

A NEW SHERLOCK HOLMES MYSTERY

# THE BOX OF CARDS



CRAIG STEPHEN COPLAND

# **The Box of Cards**



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# Dedication

To The Bootmakers of Toronto - The Sherlock Holmes Society of Canada. Since 1972, the Bootmakers of Toronto have been the leading Canadian society for the appreciation and enjoyment of Sherlock Holmes. My membership in this splendid organization of friendly, encouraging, eccentric, and quirky Sherlockians led to my quest of writing a new mystery, inspired by each of the stories in the original Canon. I am deeply grateful.

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# Chapter One

## Sherlock Holmes Reads My Mind



**N**ot all of the cases about which I have written required Sherlock Holmes to use his peculiar capacity for synthetic reasoning and his remarkable mental qualities in identifying and apprehending a man, or occasionally a woman, who had committed, or was about to commit, a murder. But many of them did.

Not all of the cases I have selected involved London's only consulting detective in using the process of scientific deduction to ascertain who had robbed, by means of theft or blackmail, his or her fellow citizen of funds, jewelry, property, or inheritance. But many of them did.

And not all of the adventures in which I accompanied him, as the chronicler of his accomplishments, exposed those unbridled passions of the human heart which lead to acts of vile revenge, rages of jealousy, or plots and machinations designed to do devastating emotional injury to a victim. But many of them did.

Yet there has only been one to date that intertwined in the darkest and most terrible chain of events all of the above: impending murder, blackmail, revenge, hatred, cruelty, and the irresistible compulsions tied to feelings of betrayal, burning desires for intimacy, and the breaking of the bonds of marriage.

It is to this case that I now set my pen.

Some poets lament the coming of April, what with its miserable cold, everlasting rain, and ceaseless damp breezes, claiming it to be the cruelest month. They are entirely off the mark. August is the cruelest month. By August, the lovely lilacs of early summer have withered and fallen back into the dead ground. The desires and memories of spring have faded. The dull rains that brought life to the dormant roots of winter have passed. By August, all we are left with is the relentless heat of the sun, without so much as a cool breath of breeze, let alone a gust of wind.

Thus it was in mid-August, in the year of Our Lord, 1905. With the thermometer above ninety, some wags, trying to affect the swagger of Americans, announced that it was "hot enough to fry an egg on the sidewalk." Holmes dismissed such claims with utter disdain, noting first that England did not have sidewalks, we had pavements; and second, that were such pavement sufficiently hot, it would melt the

bottoms of our Wellingtons. And, of course, it would be a stupid waste of a good egg.

I endured the blazing heat. I had learned to tolerate it during my service under the Raj. It was a small price to pay to have successfully begged off accompanying my wife on a visit to her relatives in Blackpool, under the guise of having to assist my friend, the unique and exceptional Sherlock Holmes, in his pursuit of the criminals who never ceased to be active in the heart of the Empire, this teeming city of five millions of people.

On the particular afternoon in which this story begins, however, there was no criminal case in Holmes's docket. I had fallen into a bit of a brown study while absorbing the entire *Daily Chronicle*, and Holmes was reading through the day's mail. The paper's front page announced the appointment of the American president, Theodore Roosevelt, to mediate a peace treaty between Japan and Russia. Over the past few years, to my mind, the Japanese had become highly expansive, seizing land and territories that did not belong to them. A few years back, they went to war with China and ended up taking control of a piece of Manchuria and all of the island of Formosa. Last fall they had blockaded then occupied Port Arthur, on the east coast of Asia. The Czar had been outraged and sent his Baltic Fleet all the way from St. Petersburg, around the Cape, and into the waters of the China Sea to do battle with the fleet of Nippon. The Russians had been soundly defeated, annihilated in fact, by the Japanese, and now the victors were exacting a punishing peace. I was not a fan of the growing Asian power and made a passing comment to that effect.

"And why," queried Holmes, without looking up, "do you find their actions so objectionable?"

"Good heavens," I responded indignantly, "a nation cannot just seize and claim a part of another country. That cannot be permitted."



“Oh, really,” said Holmes, his voiced tinged with his habitual imperiousness. “Is that not exactly what we British have done for the past three hundred years? As have the French, the Belgians, the Dutch and, even farther back, the Portuguese and the Spanish?”

“That is not at all the same,” I countered. “We brought European civilization to primitive peoples. When did we ever take whole territories away from advanced nations?”

“We could start with Canada. I do believe that the French would consider themselves to be advanced Europeans even if we do not. And I rather suspect that the rulers of India believe that they were every bit as civilized before the imposition of the Raj as afterward. I do not think that the Japanese thought terribly highly of Admiral Perry blowing up their harbor, nor the Chinese of our doping them with opium. The Belgians have hardly played the role of gentlemen in their Congo. Neither did we in taking the Cape away from the Afrikaans. Shall I continue?”

I had to ruminate about that for a minute or two.

“If your observation is correct,” I countered, “then why is it that all of Europe now objects to the expansion of the power of their Land of the Rising Sun, or whatever it is they call themselves?”

“Only because they came late to the game,” sniffed Holmes. “They are now copying Europe and doing exactly what we did. They are only condemned because they are doing so two centuries too late.”

I was not in the mood to argue the point, so I let it pass, said nothing, and returned to other stories in the newspaper. A few minutes later, I tossed it aside and rose to prepare a cup of tea.

“They are *not* just sowing their wild oats,” said Holmes.

“Of course they are,” I replied, without thinking. Then I turned to him, stunned. “Just how, in heaven’s name, Holmes, did you know what I was thinking? Really, there are times when you truly are possessed by another power.”

He laughed, merrily, but warmly. "Oh, my dear Watson. There was nothing occult about what just happened. I was in rapport with you while you were reading the third page of the newspaper, in which the story of the disappearance of the Cushing children is recorded. The writer noted, did he not, that there is some debate as to whether or not foul play was involved. Some have speculated that these two young people, having had the normal pleasures of youth so removed from them by their religiously fanatical parents, might just have run off in order to have a good time at the beaches along with all of their peers. That is the story you were reading, was it not?"

Indeed, it was.

"And as you were reading it, at you first scowled and shook your head when you considered the speculations of nefarious acts by criminal elements, and then upon finishing the last paragraph, your glance went to the mounted photograph on the bookshelf. I refer to the framed one of you as a handsome young man, resplendent in your uniform of the Northumberland Fusiliers, and as you recalled fondly the joyful, irresistible pleasures of youth your hand stole toward your old wound. Your vacant expression said that you imagined that these two young people were doing no more than escaping the suffocating bonds of their parents and reveling in the freedom of their age. Am I correct?"

He was; he always was.

"And," he continued, "having remembered your own youth so fondly, you transferred to them the same motives and feelings and wonderful foolishness that is the birthright of those who are yet to reach the age of twenty."

"I did," I acknowledged. "And for that reason, I am convinced that all this talk of kidnapping, without a shred of evidence, is poppycock and scaremongering."

"And you are wrong."

His saying this offended me since as far as I could see there was nothing to indicate any other conclusion than the

one I had reached.

"And just how, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," I snapped, "do you know that?"

He laughed, again in a friendly if infuriating manner.

"I am sorry, my dear friend. That was not fair of me, was it? I know you to be wrong because of the note that I am holding in my hand and just finished reading a moment before you put down the newspaper. Here, have a read."

He did not get up off the sofa but merely stretched out his long arm, offering the letter with the expectation that I would come over and fetch it. Grudgingly, I did as he expected. The note was from Inspector Lestrade and it ran:

Holmes. Concerning the Cushing children. The situation has become beyond strange and therefore appropriate to such skills as you possess. Meet me at the Paxtons Head in Knightsbridge at 4:00 pm. Lestrade.

"Might I prevail upon you," asked Holmes, "to join me. I do promise to behave myself and not disabuse you of any more of your befuddled notions."

I harrumphed but agreed all the same. He knew, and so did I, that there was nothing that so stirred my blood as helping Sherlock Holmes in his brilliant pursuit of evil-doers. Of course, I would go with him. It was already approaching 3:15 pm, but I would have time to fix and enjoy my tea before we departed 221B Baker Street and made our way in the afternoon swelter to Knightsbridge.

At twenty minutes before four o'clock, we hailed a cab on Baker Street and proceeded south, across Oxford Street, and along Park Lane. As we rattled down the avenues, I chanced to remark on Holmes's "mind-reading" ability.

"You know, Holmes, I have concluded that the skill you possess in discerning what is going on inside a man's head must be a necessary attribute of consulting detectives. Did not Mr. Auguste Dupin exhibit similar abilities? Remember when he reasoned from Chantilly to Orion, to Dr. Nichols, to Epicurus, and then on back to Stereotomy, the street stones

and finally beginning with fruitier. The same as you do. Quite alike in that regard, the two of you."

Sherlock Holmes visibly stiffened and glared at me with a look of having been insulted and offended.

"Good Lord, Dr. Watson. Are you incapable of using your brain to do any more than fill the void inside your cranium? That Dupin fellow is nothing but a complete work of fiction. Edgar Allen Poe concocted him entirely out of whole cloth. Anyone who is not resident in Bed'lam can see that."

I was taken aback but was not about to let the insult pass without a rebuttal.

"I beg to inform you, Holmes, that there are thousands of readers of Mr. Poe's accounts throughout the English-speaking world who do believe the stories to be factual, and we are *not* all destined to be admitted to Bethlehem."

His face softened and his tone changed to one, equally annoying, of familiar condescension. "Really, my friend, it is utterly beyond the realm of human reason. Does anyone with intelligence above that of a moron believe that there could ever have existed an enormous orangutan that would engage in shaving his bearded face, and upon being discovered, become a razor-wielding monster who decapitated an elderly woman, murdered her daughter, stuffed the daughter's body up the chimney feet first, and whose voice was identified by a French gendarme as a Spanish speaker, by the silversmith as an Italian, by a Dutchman as French, by an Englishman as a German, by a Spaniard as English, and by an Italian as a Russian. Honestly, Watson, could there be anything more absurd?"

I suppose he was right on that score. I could imagine people mistaking a language for one other than their own, but the existence of an ill-tempered, murderous ape was a bit too much of a stretch. I let that matter drop as well.

## Chapter Two

# Horror in Knightsbridge



**W**e continued on past the Duke of Wellington's modest cottage and then turned right and rumbled the few blocks to Paxtons Head. Inspector Lestrade, as wiry, as dapper, and as ferret-like as ever, was waiting for us inside. Without rising from his seat, he gestured to two chairs on the opposite side of his table.

"Have a seat. If you are hungry, I can recommend the fish and chips. They have been serving some version of that dish on this site for the past two hundred years and have finally

managed to get it right. I did not get my lunch earlier and am going to order something now. You are welcome to join me."

"Let me," I said, with respect, "place an order for the three of us." I did so at the bar and then returned to the vacant chair.

"I will not waste your time, Holmes," said Lestrade. "Nor will I waste mine. Let me get to the point immediately. I assume that you have read the latest in the press about the vanishing of these two youths and all the speculation that has accompanied it."

Holmes nodded, muttered his affirmation, and responded. "As with all accounts in the press, the facts are most likely highly distorted with the intent of selling more newspapers. Pray you, sir, give me the account as it is now known to Scotland Yard. Just the facts, please sir, just the facts."

"Right." He paused, apparently ordering the facts inside his head before delivering them.

"Right, it goes this way. I will start with the family. The father is Mr. Samuel Cushing, a senior man in the Foreign Office. Highly respected. Cambridge. Been in the Service for over thirty years. His wife, Mrs. Sarah Cushing, is somewhat younger and comes from a family with money. They live on Ennismore Gardens, just a few blocks west of here. Just a normal, respectable, English commoner's family with only a couple of exceptions.

"The first is their religious persuasion. They are devout adherents of the sect we call the Darbyites and very strict in their moral behavior and their abstinence from all known pleasant human vices. Not even a pinch of honeydew tobacco can cross their threshold. The second is that Mr. Cushing has an identical twin. Not only that, but the other brother also had a distinguished career, however, in the Home Office. He passed away just over a year ago. Cushing, his wife, his brother and his wife, all four of them, had

revolved their lives around the endless meetings at their local Gospel Hall up in Bayswater."

"Interesting," Observed Holmes. "And the help? Anything about their household staff?"

"We have learned," said Lestrade, "to always inquire about them, and so we did. There are some peculiarities, and these have given rise to yet more rumors and speculation in the press, and I must confess, among some of our police officers."

"Yes," said Holmes. "Please keep going, Inspector."

"It is not uncommon among wealthy families of some of the reformist religious sects to treat their employment of help as part of what they call their "ministry." Instead of working with reliable placement services and securing letters attesting to the character of maids and butlers and the like, they work through their church networks or they contact some of our rescue missions who are busy helping drunkards, former criminals, and fallen women to recover and establish decent lives."

"Yes," I interjected. "There are some excellent charities doing good work there. Those dear ladies over at the Elizabeth Fry Society are truly angels in the prisons of the land."

"They may well be, Doctor," acknowledged Lestrade, "but the Cushings have chosen to associate only with those charities who share their peculiar religious convictions. The maid, a buxom, pretty lass, at one time worked on the streets of the East End as a prostitute but was brought, as the Christian brothers and sisters say, to 'a saving knowledge of her Lord and Savior' as a result of being handed a gospel tract. The cook is an invalid, minus an arm and an eye as a result of an accident in a factory. He was found in the poorhouse by one of their Christian philanthropists and taught to work in a kitchen, and from all reports, has become quite good at it. The man-servant, a former soldier, stumbled in drunk to a Sunday evening

church service, came ‘under the sound of the gospel’—whatever that is supposed to be, I do not know—and was saved and as a reward, I suppose, was given employment in the Cushing household. Again, all reports are in his favor.

“Beyond that, there is nothing to distinguish the Cushing family or their help from any other family on the block. The children, a boy and a girl, had reached sixteen and fifteen years respectively. Their names, biblically inspired I believe, are Aaron and Miriam.”

“Ah, yes,” interjected Holmes. “Possibly the only brother and sister in the Scriptures after whom one would want to name your children. Either a Mary or a Martha could have been coupled with their brother Lazarus, but the Disciples lumped that poor chap in with fish and family who begin to stink after three days. And, for rather obvious reasons, Judah and Tamar would be unfortunate. So yes, Aaron and Miriam are a good choice for our devout family’s children. Pray, continue, Inspector.”

“Right. On Saturday, the lad and his sister attended a “youth fellowship” day at their church. Youth from the Gospel Halls throughout the London area get together for such functions once a fortnight in the summer time. As far as we can tell, they played a few games, had supper together, and ended the day with a Bible study and prayer session. At seven o’clock in the evening, they left the church and walked back home, as they did on all previous occasions, through Kensington Gardens and south to Knightsbridge.

“They never made it home. They would usually appear by eight. Their parents were not alarmed until ten o’clock had passed. At eleven they went out to look for them, and at midnight they called for the police.

“Now, as I am sure you are aware, Holmes, the police get countless reports of young people who do not return home on Saturday evenings in the summer time. Invariably, they got into some harmless mischief, or they imbibed some



forbidden beverage, or fell asleep at a friend's home, or any such similar event, and we have learned not to become alarmed. The always manage to show up, shamefaced, at their parents' door before the end of the following day. The local constables considered this report just another one of the same, and regardless of the parents' protestations, did nothing other than sending one of their fellows on a walk through Kensington in the middle of the night, which the officer found far more pleasant than sitting all night in the police station.

"Did he now?" asked Holmes pleasantly. "And what happened when the brother and sister failed to show up the following day?"

"The next morning, that being this Sunday past," said Lestrade, "the parents, as is their inviolable routine, attended the meetings at their church. They put the word out to all of the saints who were gathered there, asking them to report any knowledge they had. No one knew anything. So again they came to the police; this time directly to Scotland Yard. I will admit that at first we were not particularly concerned. For a child in his or her teen years to be missing for two nights is worrisome to us, but again, more often than not, they have done only what we remember wanting to do when we were young, even if we never did. They have run off to Brighton and are romping on the beach, or they are at some sporting event, or some have even run off to Paris. If the girl had been by herself, we would have been more concerned, but she was with her older brother and we reasoned that she most likely was safe. Adding to the lack of urgency was the fact, reported by the maid, that two suitcases were missing from the go-down, and many items of the children's clothing had been removed from their wardrobes."

"Which," said Holmes, "would support the contention of the police and the press that they had run off on a rebellious adventure."

“Correct,” replied Lestrade. He said nothing for a few seconds and then added, “Then, in yesterday’s post, these arrived.”

He opened an envelope and handed Holmes two oversized playing cards. Holmes passed one of them on to me. I recognized them from my time in the service. They were tarot cards, and specifically the first and second cards of the Major Arcana, *The Magician* and *The High Priestess*. I knew that they were used commonly by fortune-tellers in their divinations, but could not see any significance otherwise.

Holmes immediately pulled out his glass and spent several minutes with each of them. When he put them down, he turned to Lestrade, and in a grave voice, asked, “Did anything else come in a later post? In a small box, perhaps?”

“Aha. You spotted it. Thought you might. Have to admit that I failed to until the box arrived, and then, sure enough, we saw it too.”

“Please, both of you,” I interjected. “What did you see?”

Holmes passed me his glass and the two cards. “Observe, carefully this time, the hands.”

I did. Using the glass, I could see that on both the Magician and the High Priestess the first fingers were missing. Someone had taken a fine scalpel and cut them out, leaving a small hole in the card. Suddenly a feeling of revulsion and horror swept over me.

“Oh my good Lord,” I gasped. “What was in the box? Surely it was not what I fear.”

“Yes, Doctor,” said Lestrade. “It was exactly what you fear. Here it is. We are investigating a serious crime.”

From his satchel, he procured a small yellow cardboard box and placed it on the table in front of us. He removed the lid and inside I saw two human fingers. The fingers were not a pair. One was somewhat larger than the other and had a fingernail that was closely trimmed. The other, shorter and more slender, had a fingernail that was longer and carefully

shaped. They were packed in salt. The end of them had been cleanly severed with a sharp instrument, most likely in one fell swoop.

"What sort of monster would do such a thing?" I said.

"To that," replied Lestrade, "I have no answer. However, you can now see why I sent for you."

"I do see," said Holmes. I looked at my friend. It was usual for his eyes to sparkle with anticipation when a new case was presented to him. That, however, was not the look I saw in his eyes this time. What I saw was alarm, fear perhaps. Urgency. The stern gravity of what was in front of us had hardened his features. I knew that every cell in his exceptional brain was on alert, every muscle in his body, and every strand of emotion in his will had all been galvanized and were already fully engaged in the hunt.

In a slow, deliberate voice, he asked, "And was there any note, any demand received with these?"

"Not immediately with them," explained Lestrade. "In a later post, though, this note arrived."

He handed a second envelope to Holmes. I could see that it was addressed to Mr. Samuel Cushing, Ennismore Gardens, Knightsbridge. Holmes opened the envelope, removed the letter, and read it. He handed the envelope over to me as he did so. After several minutes, he retrieved the envelope from me and handed me the letter. Typed on the page were a few words:

One thousand pounds, Mr. Cushing, or everything you hold near and dear in your life will be destroyed.

Lestrade had learned, after many years of working with Sherlock Holmes, to be patient while Holmes looked over the evidence at hand. For five full minutes, nothing was said. Holmes then laid the letter and the envelope on the table.

"We have," said Holmes, "some leads to follow. Not terribly good ones, but a start."

"What leads? And just explain, Holmes," snapped Lestrade. "You know I have no time for any of your riddles."

“What little we have to begin with is this,” Holmes said. “Tarot cards have been around for several hundred years and there are countless versions and designs used by soothsayers, fortune tellers, and similar charlatans. But this specific design, with these pictures, is very new. It was released less than one month ago. The printing was done by the Rider Press. You can see their mark on the backside. The designs themselves were drawn by a professional illustrator, a Miss Pamela Smith. The project was sponsored by a fellow named Arthur Waite. The cards have never been used for any other reason. They are fresh and crisp. You can still smell the ink on them. They had not been removed from their box prior to being put to this awful use.”

“Arthur Waite?” I queried. “Not that mystic fellow from up Islington way. He is quite the strange one, I hear.”

“The same,” said Holmes. “There was an announcement of the new printing three weeks back in one of our wretched tabloid newspapers. There are likely no more than a hundred of the decks sold to date, and most likely all to the community of clairvoyants. That is a broad field to sort through, but it is a start.

“The ransom demand was typed on a late-model Royal typewriter. There are thousands of them extant, but perhaps fewer that are also owned by occultists. The notepaper and envelope are of exceptional quality. Not the kind you would purchase at any general goods store, but one carried only by a select group of stationers. There are no more than a dozen such merchants in the city of London. It is not at all certain that the kidnapper is from London, but it is a reasonable premise on which to begin our searches. And the typist is a man, not a woman. That is evident by the forcefulness with which the keys have been struck. That is all the evidence we had so far but we may take it that the sender of this letter is the man we want.

“However, if you will permit me, Inspector, it is possible that more evidence may be found in the Cushing home,

which is only a few blocks from here. I assume that in calling us to Knightsbridge, you did so with the intention of having us visit the home and the family."

"Right, again, Holmes. That was obvious. So yes, let us be on our way over there. The worst of the heat is gone from the day and it will not kill us to walk."

# Chapter Three

## A Family Terrorized



**E**nnismore Gardens is a lovely neighborhood that is centered on a small park and located part way between Knightsbridge Road and Brompton Road. The row of four-story white brick houses, neat and trim, with whitened steps and black doors, are not quite as posh as those inhabited by our bluebloods in Mayfair and Belgravia, but they are not to be sneezed at all the same. The families who enjoy the view of the gardens and mature trees are mostly from the upper middle classes, with well-paid positions in

His Majesty's civil services, or among the barristers and solicitors of the Inner Temple. It struck me that an enterprising kidnapper might have done far better for himself by abducting one of the scions of our nobility than the children of a civil servant, and it occurred to me, as I am sure it had already to Holmes, that perhaps money was not the only factor involved.

The Cushing family lived on the west side of the Gardens in a substantial house. A police wagon was parked in front of the door and a dozen of our parasitical press were huddled on the sidewalk. Lestrade had his carriage let us off as close to the door as possible. Holmes pulled his hat down over his forehead and we moved quickly from the curb to the front door, hoping not to be recognized by our vultures from Fleet Street.

It was to no avail. No sooner had we passed than I heard a voice shout out, "Crikey! Isn't that Sherlock Holmes?"

"Aye. 'Tis," came a reply. "There's somethin' to this if the Yard is callin' in Sherlock Holmes."

Immediately questions were shouted at Holmes, mostly containing the presupposition that the children of this excessively religious family might have turned towards the pleasures of the flesh. We ignored them and entered the home.

A tall, slender man-servant led us through the house to the back section, where it was decidedly cooler, and into the library. There we sat and waited for the master and mistress of the house to join us. In the hallway and in the library I had observed a variety of items adorning the walls. Several were framed and glassed posters bearing verses from the Bible. Others were paintings, some original oils, and others copies of scenes from the biblical narratives, or from some artist's imagining of the devotional life. In one large painting, the Lord was breaking bread with two of his followers who had astonishment written all over their faces. In another, an oversized Jesus had his hand on the shoulder of a well-

formed young man who was steering a ship through a treacherous storm. Curiously, on the wall opposite the desk, there was a familiar print of Christ but on each side were prints that had no spiritual connotation. One was quite well-known—*General Gordon's Last Stand*—in which Charles “Chinese” Gordon, defending the British garrison in Khartoum, is portrayed standing defiantly at the top of the stairs while the forces of the Madhi ascend, deadly spears in hand. The second was, I was quite sure, a portrait of the American clergyman, Henry Ward Beecher. His presence seemed odd, given that he was known to be far-removed in his religious beliefs from those practiced by the Darbyite Brethren. I would have gone over for a closer look but at that moment, Mr. and Mrs. Cushing entered the room.

Samuel Cushing was a fit man in his early fifties. He was somewhat taller than me and a little shorter than Holmes. He had a full head of hair that was once black and now speckled with shades of gray. His handsome face looked tired and his eyes looked out over bags of weariness. His wife was obviously at least fifteen years younger than her husband. Even without a trace of powder or lipstick, it was apparent that she was a physically beautiful woman, a tall, brunette, and with eyes of an unusual grey-blue shade. The flesh immediately surrounding her eyes was reddened and one could tell that she had been in tears shortly before our arrival. Her face was wan and pale. Both of these good people were under considerable duress.

We stood and greeted them as Lestrade performed the introductions. When Mr. Cushing heard the name “Sherlock Holmes,” he turned immediately and looked in amazement at my colleague.

“My goodness,” he exclaimed. “Is there really a Sherlock Holmes? I had thought you were nothing but a work of fiction, made up out of whole cloth by some scribbler for *The Strand*. Forgive me if I seem surprised that such a fabulous figure should exist in flesh and blood.”



Holmes was not amused but graciously responded, "I assure you, sir, that I do indeed exist and that the stories of my accomplishments, somewhat sensationalized by my friend here, Doctor Watson, are factually true, all of them."

"You must be joking," said Mr. Cushing, incredulously. "The only one I ever read, and I remember it clearly, told of some bizarre doctor who had a pet snake that he had trained to sip milk from a saucer, then go and bite someone and kill them, and then, upon hearing a whistle, return through the air vent to his little home inside a metal safe. Since no such creature has ever or could ever exist, the story was patent nonsense, of the same order as the American writer, Poe, and his monstrous shaving ape who decapitated the neighbors, but was then identified by some pedantic Frenchman named Lupin. Anyone who believes such lunacy belongs in Bed'lam."

I could see Holmes's entire body tensing. A touch of *sangfroid* deep within my soul made a point of remembering this incident for future reference. Given the gravity of the reason for our visit, I also refrained from mentioning to Mr. Cushing that his peculiar Christian sect firmly believed in the literal account of a talking snake who might not have been trained to sip milk but had successfully seduced a naked woman by way of an apple.

Sherlock Holmes smiled and, discretion being the better part of valor, moved on to the matters at hand.

"I know sir, and lady, that you are in a state of terrible stress and worry for your children and all I can do is promise you that I will devote my abilities, which I assure you are not fictional, to finding your children and returning them safely to you."

When he wanted to, Holmes could be quite authoritative and convincing. He spoke with such firm assurance that the parents relaxed and bid us be seated. For the next half hour, Lestrade and Holmes questioned them gently but

thoroughly concerning their children and the events leading up to their now apparent abduction. I took copious notes.

When the interview had concluded, Holmes bowed ever so slightly toward the Cushings and spoke in a humble tone of voice.

"Forgive me for making such an ill-mannered request. It is a terrible invasion of your privacy, but I have found it very useful at times to conduct a thorough examination of the residence of the people involved in a crime. May I please, with your permission, inspect all corners of your home. You have my word that nothing I discover will be spoken of beyond the ears of the people gathered in this room."

Mrs. Cushing signed and responded. "By all means, sir. If you think it would be of any use, please proceed. We have nothing to hide from anyone. I cannot think of anything you will discover that would be of any help in rescuing our son and daughter, but go right ahead, and may God give you guidance."

"In that case, I may leave you here," said Lestrade, "for I have another small business at hand. I shall meet you back at Paxtons Head in an hour and a half. Does that give you sufficient time, Holmes?"

"It does indeed."

Lestrade departed and Holmes went about his task, leaving me alone in the library. That was all well with me as I needed the time to add many more details to my notes about this gruesome case, but I had only a few minutes to myself before Mr. Cushing returned.

"Dr. Watson," he said with a forced smile, "I have totally forgotten my manners and abandoned a guest under my roof. Even under such trying circumstances, such a breach of etiquette should not be excused. We do not have any alcoholic spirits in this house but, please, let me offer you a cup of tea. Perhaps a sweet to go with it?"

I was about to refuse his offer and return to my welcomed moments of solitary work, but when I looked to respond with

words to that effect, I found myself looking into the face of a man whose visage I had seen countless times before from so many men who had walked into my medical office. It was the face of a man whose soul was in turmoil, who needed no medical treatment, but who had a burning need to sit and talk to another man, bare the burdens of his heart, and simply be listened to *sans* judgment.

"A cup of tea would be splendid," I said. "But only if you will join me. I think a quiet cup might be just what the doctor ordered."

He smiled, unfeigned this time, and pulled on the bell cord.

"Let me have Browner organize a pot and something to go with it."

The same tall man-servant who had met us at the door appeared, stood at attention, and clicked his heels together.

"Yes, sir. You rang, sir."

"Ah, Browner, my good man. I am your employer, not your commanding officer. Your years in Her Majesty's Forces are showing yet again. Please, just a pot of tea and a plate of sweets for Doctor Watson and me, if you would be so kind."

"Right away, sir." He clicked his heels again and stopped his hand part-way to his forehead as if he was going to salute. He spun around and marched out of the room and down the hall.

Mr. Cushing was shaking his head slowly. "From a military family. He has only recently joined my staff. Spent some fifteen years in the B.E.F. and I fear they have got him to the very marrow of his bones. But enough of my eccentric household help, Doctor. Might I offer you anything to read while you are waiting? As you can see, these shelves are filled with excellent books."

I knew full-well that he did not want to give me a book and then depart, so I initiated a conversation with an observation that I thought might give him an opening to begin to chat, minus his inhibitions.

“I have, indeed, been admiring your books, sir, but I must confess it is the plaques, photographs, and paintings on your wall that I find intriguing.”

“Ah, yes, those,” he said, seeming to welcome the opportunity of respite from the terrible travail of the day by engaging in idle chit-chat. “I have placed some items on my walls so that when I look up from my desk I have forcible reminders of my human frailty, and my constant need for dependence on the Word and the Lord.”

The print of Jesus I could understand in that context, but Rev. Beecher and General Gordon baffled me.

“How in the world do an American preacher and a dead British General enhance your spiritual condition?” I asked, in innocent bewilderment.

He leaned back in his chair and looked up at the items to which I had referred.

“Since you are a doctor, sir, I suppose I can be frank and confess that the portrait of Rev. Beecher is there to remind me of the constant necessity to keep my physical appetites, or I should say, my sexual appetites, under close guard lest they destroy everything I have tried to build up over my lifetime. Beecher, you may recall, was an exceptionally gifted evangelist who was used powerfully by God not only to call sinners to salvation but to help right the dreadful wrong of slavery in America. He could have continued to have a wonderful ministry and perhaps even have become president of the United States had it not been for his giving in to the weaknesses of the flesh and having an affair with the wife of his friend and colleague. His example serves as a constant admonishment to all of us to be on the alert against such temptations and to be clad daily in the full armor of God so that we might be protected from the wiles of the evil one.

“The print of the death of General Gordon is a much more directly personal reminder, Doctor. Thirty years ago, when I was an ambitious up-and-coming officer in the Foreign

Service, I was promoted beyond my years to hold the desk for Egypt and the Sudan. General Gordon was sent to Khartoum to evacuate the British garrison and leave the Sudanese natives to their fate at the hands of the Mahdi rebels. He bravely refused to follow those orders, and he stayed and protected the city and all its inhabitants. For a full year, he held out and he kept sending requests for reinforcements, which were available up in Egypt, and could have been sent to relieve his men and secure the city. His requests landed on my desk and it was my job to forward recommendations directly to Prime Minister Gladstone, who kept the portfolio of Foreign Secretary for himself. I knew what the Prime Minister and his Cabinet wanted to hear. They detested General Gordon. He was an ardent Conservative and a favorite of Benjamin Disraeli. They were determined to make an example of him so as to assert their authority over the Her Majesty's Forces. They wanted reasons to ignore his pleas and I gave them what they wanted to hear. In my heart as well as in my head, I knew the truth and I chose to ignore it and seek the favor of men instead.

"You know what happened, Doctor Watson. Popular opinion eventually was so enraged by Gladstone's arrogance that he gave in and sent the requested relief. They arrived two days after the Mahdi rebels had stormed the city, murdered General Gordon, and savagely killed over ten thousand of the inhabitants who had been loyal to the British Empire. The carnage was brutal. Our soldiers and our loyal natives were tortured and had terrible things, too dreadful to speak of, done to them."

Here he paused, gazing again at the painting.

"Their blood is, at least to some extent, on my hands. I will have to answer at the last judgment for my actions and I will have to, again, confess that I heeded my own selfish ambition instead of doing what I knew to be right, regardless of the personal consequences. Since that day, I have, with

the Lord's help, tried to the best of my ability never to make that error again. I have steadfastly held out for doing what I believed to be the right thing, often against the concerted will of short-sighted politicians and greedy commercial interests. There has been a price to pay for it, but over time it has won me the respect of my peers and has given me a clear conscience with which to fall asleep every night. Having General Charles Chinese Gordon staring down at me every day is a constant and painful reminder I have given to myself that I must never, never again let down my guard and sacrifice my eternal integrity for the temporal praise of men."

I nodded my agreement and conveyed my genuine admiration of his record. We chatted some more about some of the other pictures on the walls, and then about his children. He was very proud of them. And then we turned to the matter at hand and he just shook his head and admitted that he was entirely in the dark and simply could not understand what had happened.

Eventually Sherlock Holmes returned from his inspection of the home and fetched me from the library. We bid our good evening to Mr. and Mrs. Cushing and walked the few blocks through Knightsbridge back to Paxtons Head.

# Chapter Four

## What Holmes Discovered



**L**estrade was waiting for us  
“Speak up, Holmes,” said Lestrade. “What of interest did you find? You always find something. Enlighten me.”

Holmes slowly lit his pipe and took several puffs on it, and then a slow pull on his ale, followed by several more puffs. He and Lestrade had been at each other in their

games of tit-for-tat for close on to two decades. There was no sign of a peace settlement on the horizon.

"They are a very fine lot," he began. "An unusual aspect of their beginning as a family was their wedding. Did you notice the photographs on the mantle in the library? Not only does Mr. Cushing have an identical twin, so does his wife. And the two identical twin brothers married the two identical twin sisters. We have to assume that the respective husbands and wives learned to identify one from the other or all manner of strange things might have occurred."

"We are not here," said Lestrade, "to speculate on prurient possibilities. What did you find that could shed light on the abduction of the children?"

"Ah, yes. I am coming to that. Your patience, please, Inspector. Mr. Cushing opened his file drawer to me in which he kept all of his records since he was a callow youth. He has assiduously accounted for every cent he has earned and spent for forty years. Although he did not refer me to it, I did note that he had tithed his gross income and then some, without fail. His tithe was donated to his Christian Assembly and many additional gifts were given to various missions and charities that provide life's necessities for the indigent. He is a man of impeccable moral rectitude.

"His dear wife, as far as I could see, is of the same stock. She is blessed with an abundance of material wealth from her family but also gives alms to the poor and regularly participates as a volunteer not only with the church but with Bernardo's Homes, George Mueller's orphanages, The Royal Society for the Blind, and the Royal Humane Society. She has received, but does not display, numerous silver plates and other tokens of recognition for her service to humanity. These were all wrapped up and stored inside the bed storage box in her room. A very fine, modest lady indeed."

"Is this account going somewhere, Holmes," said Lestrade, cutting in. "What about the children? Any evidence of wild oats being sown?"



“Surprisingly, no. Their school records were entirely positive, praising them not only for their academic achievements but also for their character and their athletic abilities. The boy, Aaron, was the captain of the harrier team and had several ribbons to attest to his endurance and success. The girl, Miriam, was a member of the school track and field team and excelled at the hundred yard dash. They had many citations from their church youth organizations and had spent all of the past month of July with the Scripture Union mission, handing out tracts and helping in vacation Bible schools.

“Right,” said Lestrade. “Just what we would expect from young people who devote themselves to prayer and Bible study. But not a clue about their vanishing.”

“My dear Inspector, I just gave you a very significant piece of evidence.”

“You did nothing of the sort, Holmes. What evidence?”

“Inspector, did you not listen to me? I pointed out to you that both of them *could run*.”

Lestrade was silenced. He shook his head, took a sip of his ale, and responded. “Yes Holmes, I suppose you did. And if they were accosted while walking back through Kensington Gardens it must either have been by a group of men who suddenly overpowered them, or by someone they knew and trusted. At the very least, someone they did run away from. The lawns in the Gardens are wide open. Unlikely anyone could have caught up with them. Very interesting, Holmes. Right. Anything else?”

Here Holmes moved his body in such a way as said to me that he was not entirely at ease with what he was about to say.

“This next observation is only speculation and I hesitate to make it so early on and without anywhere near sufficient data.”

“Right,” said Lestrade. “Get on with it anyway. We are not here to pander to your moral scruples.”

“Although it is beneath the dignity of a gentleman to do so, I examined in some detail the lady’s toiletries, dressing closet, and even her lingerie.”

“Blimey, Holmes,” sneered Lestrade, “you are getting downright strange. So, what did you find?”

“The lady refrains from any use of lipstick, powders, or other cosmetics, and has only a few small, howbeit expensive, pieces of jewelry. But she does make use, to a very limited degree, of perfume.”

“For Pete’s sake, Holmes. Get on with it. I’m getting old waiting,” said Lestrade.

“She uses *Mille Fleurs*, and only that brand and no other. It is one of the more popular of the high-end perfumes. Her clothing, her pillow, her bed linen all bore that faint but unmistakable scent.”

“Holmes, I’m waiting.”

“Her husband’s clothes, but to a lesser degree, all had the same scent attached to them, which is to be expected. What was not expected was that some of his suits and shirts also had a very faint scent of Yardley’s Lavender.”

Here Holmes paused, waiting until the importance of what he had just said sunk in.

“Good heavens, Holmes,” I gasped. “You cannot be suggesting that he has been so physically close to another woman as to acquire the scent of her bodily soaps and perfumes.”

“I fear, my friend, that is exactly what I am suspecting.”

“What about the daughter?” demanded Lestrade. “She’s just fifteen but that’s when some young women today start to spread their wings and get a little bit of you-know-what in their blood.”

“I examined the daughter’s boudoir as well. And yes, the young lady has started to use some perfume. Secreted away in her closet was a small bottle that was only half full.”

“Was it Lavender?” I asked. “A loving father would be expected to give his daughter a tender embrace from time

to time.”

“As he should, of course,” replied Holmes. “But alas, no, it was *Jockey Club*, the brand most prized by young women today who are intent on asserting their femininity.”

All three of us sat in silence for the next several minutes, not at all sure about what to do with the information we had acquired.

“I suggest, my friends,” said Holmes, “that we install this data in the backs of our minds until we know more. However, it does open to us the possibility of actions driven by passions, jealousy, and revenge. These all too often overtake reason and even greed as motives for the most diabolical of crimes.”

Lestrade and I nodded our agreement and, the discussion having concluded, we returned to our abodes for the evening.

I spent the next day at my medical practice, attending to my patients. At the end of the day, since my dear wife had not returned from depleting my bank account up north of the River Ribble, I hastened back to 221B Baker Street. It was still a hot August day, but the heat had gone out of the afternoon by the time I climbed the familiar seventeen steps and was greeted by the indefatigable Mrs. Hudson. She sat me down and returned a minute later with an iced lemonade. I remarked yet again to myself how lucky Sherlock Holmes had been to find such a woman who, having determined that Holmes was the most dreadful tenant in all of London, still not only put up with him but positively doted on the chap.

“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “went out early this morning, and has not returned. He did say that he would be back by suppertime, so I have it prepared and waiting. I expect him shortly.”

She hardly had these words out of her mouth when I heard the door on Baker Street open and then the thuds of Holmes bounding up the stairs two at a time.

“Merciful heavens,” I said as he entered the room. “You must have had a rewarding day. Have you found the missing children?”

“Oh, no. Not yet. But I have had excellent results from my hours of plodding and slogging. Tomorrow we have a very good chance of identifying the kidnapper. Or, possibly the day after tomorrow. But he is within my grasp. It will not be long.”

Over a plate of Mrs. Hudson’s perfectly poached salmon, he chatted on happily about his various escapades. He had started with the stationery, the very refined writing paper on which the ransom demand was written.

“It took several hours but I was able to assemble a list of all of the shops that sell that quality of paper. It is a linen base, not mere pulped wood and costs at least two pence a page. There are, in fact, only ten shops in all of London that sell it. Of course, it might have been purchased in another city, but I think that unlikely. I was able to visit several of the shops before they closed for the day and eliminate five. That leave me only five to return to tomorrow and secure from them their list of recent customers for this very peculiar purchase. Then we shall move on and find the fellow.”

In between forkfuls of salmon, and swallows from a bottle of claret, he would occasionally rub his hands in unfettered glee. When dinner ended, we retired to our chairs in front of the unlit hearth and he poured a generous brandy for both him and me.

“To your health, Doctor. And to the relentless pursuit of justice.”

Holmes then spent the next few minutes talking about nothing other than violins, narrating with great exultation how he purchased his own Stradivarius. This led him to Paganini and anecdote after anecdote about that extraordinary man who played with such inhuman skill that his listeners, in wonderment, thought him possessed by the devil.

His good humor did not last long.

A knock came to the door on the street and we listened as someone plodded slowly up the stairs. Lestrade entered the room. His shoulders were slouched over and his countenance was grim.

Without a word, he withdrew an envelope from his suit pocket, opened it, and placed two more tarot cards on the table. From my chair, I could see that they were the next two cards of the Major Arcana, *The Emperor* and *The Empress*. I reached for one and Holmes for the other.

"Oh, no. Oh, no," I muttered, choking on my words as a sickening feeling swept over me. The left hand of both figures had been cut out, leaving small holes in the cards. Lestrade then opened his valise, took out a cardboard box and placed it on the table beside the cards. It was about a foot square and four inches in depth.

"Open it," he said, his voice flat and emotionless. I did so, fearing the worst and, a second later, having those fears confirmed. Inside the box were two human left hands. They were packed in salt but even without brushing it away and making a close examination, I could see that one was from a young woman, the other a young man.

Holmes sat back in his chair, his lower lip was trembling slightly. He made no effort to take out his glass or look at the horrific items in front of us.

"Was there," he said in a whisper, "any demand note? Anything?"

"No. Nothing."

"Any other markings on the box beyond what is here now?"

"No. None."

"Thank you, Inspector. I appreciate your bringing the evidence over to me. If you will permit me to examine it, it can then be taken to the morgue."

"That's why I brought it."

"Yes, of course. Thank you."

“Inspector,” I said, “What of the family? They must be in dire straits.”

“They are, and it is most understandable. They cannot leave their door without being besieged by the press. Somehow it became known that the maid was what the press call a ‘Gladstone Girl’—you recall that our Prime Minister used to prowl the streets of Whitechapel searching for young prostitutes that he could rescue—and questions are being shouted to these devout people about their operating a brothel and all that sort. It has not helped that the maid failed to come to work this morning and has possibly returned to her former profession. I have stationed two constables at the doorway to make sure that friends may enter and leave without being impeded. Unfortunately, I can do nothing about the provocative shouts and murmurs.

“I am not, as you know, Holmes, in the habit of darkening the door of any church, established, Romish, or otherwise, but I do give due credit to the friends of the family. They have been visiting them constantly, bringing food and offering to help in whatever is needed. And, of course, having constant prayer meetings. But even with that, the pain and suffering of the parents is pitiable.”

“I can well imagine,” said Holmes. He then went on to explain what progress he had made in tracking down the source of the notepaper used by the kidnapper for the ransom letter. The police inspector and the consulting detective then parted for the evening, promising to keep each other informed of any advances.

The following morning I rose at an early hour, only to find that Holmes had already had a coffee and departed the house. I was not surprised. It was in his character that once he set upon the scent of a criminal, he stopped at nothing in his dogged pursuit. I had known him to go for several days with no sleep, little food and sustained for the most part by coffee and tobacco.

I spent the day in my medical practice, returning in the early evening to a solitary supper that Mrs. Hudson had dutifully prepared.

"I'll leave some cold cuts out for Mr. Holmes," she said. "Goodness only knows when he'll get in. If you are still up when he does, Doctor, do try to get him to eat something."

I promised that I would and waited up until near eleven o'clock before I heard Holmes familiar tread on our stairs. I greeted him, insisted that he be seated, and placed the food in front of him. To my relief, he ate at least a portion of it before pushing the plate back away.

"So," I began, quite casually. "What news? Have you found the kidnapper's stationer?"

He lit a cigarette, inhaled, and sighed. "I do believe I have. It was nothing brilliant on my part; merely the eliminating of all the other possible shops until only one remained. I visited there at the end of the day and confirmed that they did indeed carry this line and color of writing paper and envelopes and that they had sold a package of it recently. Unfortunately, it was only a shop girl on duty and she did not have access to the records. The proprietress was gone for the day but I am told that she comes in early in the morning. Tomorrow morning I will be there to greet her when she does."

"Well done, my friend," I said, trying to offer some encouragement to my weary companion. "Anything else?"

"Yes. The family received another ransom note. Lestrade has it but he showed it to me. The perpetrator of this horrible crime has upped his demand to two thousand pounds and has given a bank account in Zurich into which the funds must be paid within two days, or, to quote from the letter 'All hell will descend upon you and your family.' "

"But were there any other ..." I hesitated to say more.

"More cards, or body parts?" Holmes anticipated my question. "No, for which I assume we should be thankful."

He said no more, retired to his chair and lit up another cigarette. I sat in silence across from him, rising only to retrieve the plate of food from the table and place it on the coffee table in front of him.

At eleven thirty, we rose to retreat to our bedrooms when there was a loud banging on our door. We both looked at each other in bewilderment and I hastened down the stairs and opened it.

I could see no one, but on the doorstep was a box, elegantly tied with a wide red ribbon, and with an envelope attached under it. I picked it up, brought it up the stairs and into our parlor, and placed it on our coffee table, beside the still uneaten plate of food.

Holmes looked at it blankly for a short time and then leaned forward and took the envelope. I watched as he opened it. The look of pain that invaded his face was message enough. He withdrew two more tarot cards and placed them on the table. They were the next two in the Major Arcana suit, *The Hierophant* and *The Lovers*. My hand trembled as I picked them up. The right foot of the Hierophant had been cut out, as had the right foot of the female lover.

I sat motionless for a minute, then took a deep breath and reached for the box. I looked up at Holmes and he nodded. I slowly undid the ribbon and removed the lid. Inside, covered in salt, were two severed right feet. One obviously belonging to a young man, the other to a young woman. There was a note placed beside them.

"Read it, please, Doctor," said Holmes, his voice drained of all emotion.

It ran:

Dear Sherlock Holmes: Wasn't it good of me to spare your fellow incompetent, Lestrade, the trouble of bringing these to you. Please enjoy the pain. It is your payment for interfering.



“Might I prevail upon you, my dear friend,” he said to me, “to come with me first thing tomorrow morning? And perhaps you could bring your service revolver with you.”

## Chapter Five

# Following the Paper Trail



The sun rose the following morning shortly after six o'clock. Half an hour later we were out of 221B Baker St., having given breakfast a pass, and in a cab on our way to the elegant, exclusive shops of the West End. Neither Holmes nor I frequented this area often, the prices being well beyond the means of our pocketbooks. The object of our investigation, however, appeared to have rich tastes and our presence on Bond Street was required.

At seven o'clock, the cab discharged us at the corner of Bond and Burlington Gardens. The sign above the shop we were approaching read *Missolonghi's - Stationery and Fancy Goods Emporium*.

"This is the only shop," Holmes explained again, in case I have forgotten our conversation from the night before, "that sells the particular brand of notepaper, and that has, in the past two weeks, sold a packet in the particular color used by our monster. I am hoping that the good lady who owns the establishment has kept a record of her customers, as should all select shops that cater to an elite clientele."

The shop had not yet opened for business but by peering through the window, we could see an elegantly dressed woman setting out the displays of her wares on the counters. Holmes tapped on the glass, got her attention, and beckoned her to open the door.

"Well, my goodness," she exclaimed, "aren't you two chaps eager this morning. Let me guess; today is the wedding anniversary of one of you and you forgot until you woke up this morning, and now you are in a panic lest your wife be devastated yet again by your hopelessly unromantic behavior."

She laughed merrily as she spoke and gestured to us to enter. "Well, come on in, gentlemen. You are not the first nor will you be the last that I have had to save from well-deserved punishment. I would guess that neither of you has even had breakfast yet. There is some coffee and some sweet breads in the back office. Have a seat and I will bring some and you can tell me your desperate tale of woe."

She gestured to us to be seated on an elegant sofa and glided her way toward the back of the store.

"I fear," I said *sotto voce*, "that we will disappoint her when all we ask for is information about her customers."

"Not at all," said Holmes, with the first trace of a smile I had seen on his face for days. "if I remember correctly, this coming Saturday is your wedding anniversary and you have

totally forgotten about it, haven't you?. Your dear Mary will be returning from Blackpool, and you had better have something elegant to express your undying love and how awfully you have missed her."

I was speechless. "Oh my goodness," I whispered, "you are right. Thank you. But the goods in this emporium are far beyond my means. Just a simple set of earrings would set me back a hundred pounds."

"Well then, you had better ask about their elegant packages of writing paper."

The lady who had greeted us returned bearing a platter with a flask of coffee and some delectable rolls and pastries and set them in front of us.

"And might you," Holmes inquired graciously, "be Mrs. Missolonghi, the owner of this fine establishment?"

She laughed again. "Oh no, no. I am the owner but my name is Tiffany Barnes. However, if you are not in too great a rush this morning, I will tell you how the store was named. It is a most amusing story, or, at least, it is to some people."

"I am all attention," said Holmes. I knew from years of observing him that he invariably extracted more information from people from all walks of life by friendly conversation and genuine interest in them than would ever have happened had he been belligerent and demanding.

"I must admit," he continued, "I find it quite a puzzle to understand how a lovely lady named in honor of a posh shop in New York City, came to be the owner of a posh shop in the West End, named after some obscure village in Greece, made famous for being the last place on earth where Lord Byron was, if I may say, being Byronic."

"Oh, how splendid," she exclaimed, clapping her hands together. "A learned man. Well then sir, whoever you are, it so happens that both my mother and father were, in their youth, hopeless Romantics and entirely besotted with the poetry and stories of Lord Byron. Yes, the one who was 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know.' They came from excellent

families but were a bit wild at heart and took themselves on grand tours of the Continent, and made a pilgrimage to Missolonghi, in the south of Greece, to pay homage at the place where their hero died his tragic death. They met each other there and within an hour had fallen in love. They found a Greek priest to marry them in some old chapel on the shores of the Aegean Sea. On their wedding night, my father read Byron's poetry to my mother which, I have to assume, positively threw her into heat and nine months later, I arrived on this planet, beginning my life on some pleasant island in the Mediterranean. I was born on the feast of Epiphany, and in keeping with Greek custom, I was named Theophania. Since that was just too much Greek for their families, they settled on the English version, 'Tiffany.' And so here I am, and quite pleased to have two fine gentlemen in my store so early on a summer morning. But permit me, kind sirs, who is it that I have the pleasure of assisting at this early hour?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my colleague, Dr. John Watson."

The woman again clapped her hand in front of her bosom. Then repeated the gesture, causing her sparkling diamond necklace to bounce up and down. "Oh my! Oh my! *The Sherlock Holes* has come to my shop. Oh my! How wonderful. Does this mean that my store is going to be in one of your stories, Dr. Watson? Is somebody about to be murdered here? Oh my! Think of the traffic that would create. That would bring record sales. Oh my! How utterly gorgeous. Or did some foolish husband buy some lovely diamonds for his mistress? And his wife found out? Did she poison him? Oh my! Do tell. What happened? This is beyond my dreams. The shop will be overrun with the curious. All those bluebloods just cannot resist a mystery, especially if diamonds are involved. It would all be so ... well ... so deliciously *Byronic*. My mom and dad would be so proud of

me. Oh please, do tell, sir. What has brought Sherlock Holmes into my shop?"

I was at a loss for words and briefly so was Sherlock Holmes. He recovered, cleared his throat, and replied in his practiced gracious manner.

"My dear Miss Tiffany, you are correct in deducing that my visit is part of an investigation and we are in need of your help. Please understand that the matter is extremely delicate and I am precluded from giving any details. I can, however, promise, that should you be able to help us, my colleague, Dr. Watson, will most certainly give full credit to you and your shop."

She beamed back at him and, yet again, clapped her hands. "Well then, sir, just ask away. I never imagined that someday I might be interviewed by Sherlock Holmes. Oh, it is such a shame that our photographer is not here. Having a photo of you looking in through the shop window while sipping your coffee would be such a splendid advert in the *Times*. But that cannot be helped. Just go ahead with your questions, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes leaned forward and looked directly at Miss Tiffany Barnes. I took out my notebook, ready to take down every word.

He pulled out the note that bore the ransom demand and handed it, with the writing side down, to the lady.

"I believe that you sold a packet of this fine stationery during the past fortnight, did you not?"

"Yes, I did. I remember it exactly. It was on the Monday of the week before last. Well, possibly it was the Tuesday. Not really sure what day. But I do remember the fellow who bought it. Fine looking gentleman. Nicely dressed. His suit was most certainly an Italian cloth, sold only on Saville Row. His handkerchief was Chinese silk. It differs from the Indian variety and has a finer weave. White, it was. Yes. Or was it ivory? Oh pooh, the color is not important. What mattered is that it was top drawer Chinese, and not something from the

Punjab. He asked for a simple package of stationery. Well, I took one look at him and I knew right away that I was not going to sell him just any old bunch of paper and envelopes. No, sir. I could see that he had very fine taste and so I brought out our most expensive line. Fine linen. Twenty-four pound it was. He paid for it with a five-pound note and waved me away when I offered him the change. And then he departed. Yes, sir. I remember him exactly."

"Did he give you his name?"

"Oh no sir, we never ask for names when gentlemen come in here unaccompanied by their wives. Why all sorts of chaps come here to buy gifts for their mistresses and they do so having full trust in our ability to protect their anonymity. So no sir, of course we did not ask for his name."

I could see Holmes countenance and body become more tense, but he put on his friendly face and continued.

"Miss Tiffany, it is of critical importance that we locate this man. It is a matter of life and death. Please try to remember anything else you can about him."

"Honestly, Mr. Holmes, I have told you everything I can remember about the fellow." She stopped and looked distressed. I perceived that she might have imagined her role in a mystery story vanishing.

"I am so sorry, sir, that I have no idea who he was. But would it help if I gave you the address to which I had the package delivered?"

Holmes looked intently at her and then his face relaxed into an unfeigned smile.

"Yes, miss, that would be most helpful."

"Oh, well you should have said so sir. We keep all the delivery addresses on record, just not the names of the men who make such purchases. Let me look it up for you."

She rose and retreated to the back office. She was gone for over five minutes and when she reappeared, she was bearing yet another tray with coffee and pastries.

“Here you go, gentlemen. You enjoy another round while I look up the record.”

From under the plate of pastries, she extracted a ledger book and opened it. She ran her finger down the page, muttering comments about the items and the purchasers as she did so. I poured us two more cups of coffee and enjoyed another portion of my breakfast.

“Oh, oh! Here it is. Yes. Here. Look. On Thursday of two weeks ago: one package of Vergé of Paris. They have a very select line, they do. Delivered to 85 Montpelier Square, Knightsbridge. Oh now, wasn’t that ducky? He came all the way to us instead of just dropping into Harrods’s. A man with very demanding taste. Do you not agree, Mr. Holmes? Is that of some help to you, sir?”

“It is indeed, Miss. Very helpful. You may have helped solve a terrible crime and even prevent a murder.”

One more time, she clapped her hands and beamed with joy.

Having finished our breakfast at Tiffany’s we walked toward to door. As we did, Holmes whispered to me.

“There is a man standing on the pavement who has been observing us while we have been in here. As soon as we exit, turn right and try to catch him. And, by the way, you forgot to buy your anniversary gift.”

The fellow he was referring to must have sensed that Holmes had noticed him, for as we opened the door, he sprang across the street and into the driver’s seat of a parked carriage. He laid a whip upon the haunches of the horse and it bounded way, straight through the section of road repairs on Bond Street. The small carriage bounced and rattled as it raced across the potholes and piles of gravel. The driver had, although obviously shaken, not stirred from his perch and continued his escape. In the distance, I could see him turn right on Piccadilly and disappear in the direction of Green Park.



“Someone is on to us,” said Holmes. “We have to move quickly.”

We hailed a cab and Holmes offered the driver a sovereign if he would race through the road construction and get us to Knightsbridge in less than ten minutes. The cabbie cooperated and soon we were galloping along Piccadilly and passing Hyde Park Corner.

“What’s the address?” shouted the cabbie.

I was about to shout back the number on Montpelier Square when Holmes put his hand on my arm and shouted out the address of the Cushing House on Ennismore Gardens.

“If the children are being held there, they will most likely be too terrified to reveal themselves to us, given what they have already endured. We will stop and pick up their father. They will know his voice.”

We galloped further along Knightsbridge Road and around the corner onto Ennismore. Upon reaching the Cushing home, I leapt from the cab, happy to see that it was too early in the morning for the press to have gathered, and pounded on the door. The butler opened it and I barged past him into the parlor. There I stopped in my tracks. Seated in the room were Mr. and Mrs. Cushing, and Inspector Lestrade. Two constables were standing in the hallway. On the coffee table was a box, identical in size to the one delivered to Holmes the previous night. The ribbon was undone and lying loosely on the table. The top of the box was in place. I knew immediately what I was looking at.

I gathered my wits and spoke as forcefully as I could. “Please, Mr. Cushing and Inspector, come with me. Holmes is outside in a cab. We may have located the children. Please come now.”

Lestrade and Mr. Cushing both jumped to their feet and raced out the door. I followed, stepped up into the cab as it pulled away from the curb. I dropped into the seat beside Lestrade who leaned his head to my ear. “Cards seven and

eight. *The Chariot* and *Strength*. The right hand and forearm."

We pulled to a sharp halt upon reaching the house on Montpelier. It was similar in many respects to the Cushing home a few blocks away; another fine four-story row house in Knightsbridge, facing onto a leafy square. Lestrade bolted from the cab and knocked firmly on the door. It was opened by a tall, grave-looking maid, with a very shiny cap, who expressed shock on hearing the inspector announce that he was from Scotland Yard.

"Where is your master?" demanded Lestrade.

"Sir," the distraught woman sputtered, "he is where he is every morning by this time. He is at his office, or maybe in court over in Temple Bar."

"And your lady?"

"She...she...sir, she is at the hairdresser. She has a luncheon today in Mayfair. I can send for her sir. Do you wish me to do that?"

Lestrade stopped shouting. "No. No. That will not be necessary. Who is it we are looking for, Holmes?"

"Very sorry to intrude upon you, miss," said Holmes. "We are searching for a gentleman, about my height, most likely well-dressed and we have reason to believe that he lives here."

"Oh," the poor woman sighed as her face and body relaxed. "You must mean Mr. Gulliver, the tenant. He rents the fourth floor from my master. But he is seldom here. He says he has plans in the future to set up a studio up there, but right now there are only a few sticks of furniture and a small kitchen. I can show you up there, but he has not been around for several days."

The four of us pushed the poor soul aside and bounded up the stairs. The fourth floor was not much more than an attic, accessed by a steep, narrow stairway at the back of the house. The door was locked. Holmes reached into his pocket for the small set of locksmith tools he always carried

with him. Lestrade shoved him aside, raised his leg and gave a powerful kick to the door, smashing the lock.

“There are some things the police are allowed to do that amateur detectives cannot,” he said as he entered the rooms. We followed him and within less than fifteen seconds we had opened every door, every closet, and every cupboard. There was no one there.

We met in the front room, every one of us empty-handed. “Clearly the children are not here,” said Holmes. “However, the notepaper on the desk and the Royal typewriter tell us that we are in the right place. So I suggest that all of us look for whatever evidence we can find that might be helpful in leading us to them.”

## Chapter Six

# The Sins of the Father



**W**e nodded and began to look slowly through the cabinets, desk drawers, and wardrobes. I watched as Mr. Cushing opened the door of a wardrobe in the bedroom. Inside were several shirts and a couple of men's suits. On the floor were a pair of boots and two pairs of shoes. Mr. Cushing suddenly stepped back and I saw a look of shock on his face. He turned and stepped quickly into the front room and walked to the desk that sat along the front wall beside the window. On top of the desk was a powerful set of field

glasses. He picked them up and looked out. Then he slowly opened the central drawer of the desk and removed a large bulky envelope. From it, he extracted a handful of photographs. I could see the color draining from his face as he did so. He put them down and walked backwards slowly until he reached a chair. He sat down, placed his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, and began to weep uncontrollably. His entire body was shaking and his crying was pathetically loud for a grown man.

The wretched noises he was making immediately brought Holmes and Lestrade back into the room. I held up my hand and silently gestured to them to sit in the chairs that were on the other side of the room. They did so and I picked up the stack of photographs that Mr. Cushing has so recently placed back on the desk. I looked at them one after the other before handing them on to Holmes and Lestrade.

They made no sense at all. All of them were of Mr. Cushing and his wife. The first ones in the pile were taken at the front door of his home on several occasions spanning the past winter and spring. In each he was giving his wife and affectionate kiss. I assumed at first that he was leaving for work until I noticed that in the winter scenes the streetlights had already been lit.

The others, farther down in the pile were very unseemly. They had been taken through the window of the house and were clearly photos of Mr. and Mrs. Cushing engaging in private acts such as are the pleasure of a loving married couple. The photos on the bottom of the pile left nothing to the imagination. It was all exceedingly perplexing.

I had noticed that in one of the kitchen cupboards there was a bottle of a select brandy. I poured a generous glass and brought it to the poor man, who was still convulsing in grief.

"Sam," I said. "I do not care if this is forbidden by your church. Swallow it, take a few deep breaths, and then compose yourself."

He looked up. His face was contorted and tears were streaming from his eyes. Without saying anything, he took the glass and swallowed the contents. I saw him take several deliberate deep, slow breaths. He raised his head and spoke, but very slowly.

"The man your are looking for is Alec Fairbairn."

"Go on please, Sam," I said.

"He is my brother-in-law."

Holmes looked puzzled and spoke. "Your brother-in-law, I had understood, was also your brother. And he died last year. What are you saying?"

"No, my wife had two sisters. One, Mary, is her twin and was married to my twin brother, Seth. The four of us have been very close to each other for the past twenty years. There is a third sister, Susan. She is younger and is married to a chap named Alec Fairbairn."

"I am afraid," said Lestrade sharply, "that I do not see where this is going. Please enlighten me, sir. And do so quickly. Your children are still at risk and in mortal danger."

"Perhaps," interjected Holmes, "I can help you get started. The front door in the photographs is not your home, nor is the bedroom window. The woman with whom you are being intimate is not your wife, Sarah. It is your sister-in-law, Mary, the widow of your brother, Seth."

Cushing said nothing. He dropped his head back into his hands and nodded it slowly.

"And might it also be true," continued Holmes, "that there has been an estrangement between the four twins and the other sister and brother-in-law? Animosity, even?"

Cushing nodded again.

"Your brother-in-law somehow became aware of your affair and has blackmailed you, threatening to expose everything and ruin your well-respected life. And if I were to pick up the field glasses and look across the square, would I be looking directly at the front door of your deceased brother's home

where his widow continues to live, and then into the window of her bedroom?"

Samuel Cushing raised himself up and looked directly at Holmes. "Yes sir, that is precisely what happened and what you would see."

None of us spoke and then Lestrade nearly shouted at us.

"Good lord, that is no more than an everyday case of blackmail against some bloke who cannot keep his trousers on. We see that every day. How in the world do dismembered children fit into this? Where are they? Who is this monster of a brother-in-law that is not happy with a few thousand pounds? This makes no sense!"

"Sir," said Cushing quietly, turning to Lestrade. "For that, I have no answer. Alec and Susan grew up in the same Christian Assembly as Mary, Seth, Sarah and I did. They were in our wedding party and were married three years later. Yet immediately after they were removed from the authority of their parents' homes, they began to partake of the pleasures of the world. They were reported to have gone dancing together, to have attended raucous and obscene performances in the music halls. They passed their time with a whole group of ungodly friends in the local pub and a little drink would send them into stark, raving, depraved utterances. They dabbled in devilish, occult practices. They even strayed so far from the straight and narrow as to place bets on horses at the racetrack. This became known to the elders of the Assembly, and they were visited and spoken to. There was no improvement and the admonishment was repeated. They refused to change and even exulted in what they called their freedom. Sadly, it was necessary to read them out of fellowship."

"You mean you and all the good saints in your church shunned them?" said Holmes.

"Such an extreme action is only ever taken for the purpose of redemption and restoration," said Cushing. "However, they would have none of it. Perhaps they might

have seen the error of their ways but my father-in-law, Sarah and Mary's father, died and when his will was read, we learned that he had cut them out entirely. Nothing was to be given to them. Not even the childhood dolls with which Susan had played. The four of us thought it terribly harsh and unfair but there was nothing that could be done about it. The terms of the will were explicit and binding. That ended any contact we had with them. Susan's temper was unleashed. To this day, we have not spoken."

"You still," snapped Lestrade, "have not explained how this Alec fellow could be such a monster."

Cushing looked stunned. "Sir, I have no answer for that. Alec was my friend growing up. He was outgoing, playful, perhaps attracted a bit much to the things of this world, but never, never one to injure another person. And that he would torture and maim my children, his niece and nephew, is beyond belief. Somehow...somehow, the evil one has taken his soul. I have no other explanation."

"This Alec chap," said Lestrade, "where do we find him?"

Cushing gave us an address in Chelsea and then added, "He works for Barings in the City. But he does not usually depart from his home until near to ten each morning. You might meet him as he stepped out of his front door in a half hour from now."

"My dear, Doctor," said Holmes, looking at me. "Might I prevail upon you to stay with Mr. Cushing and see him home? I believe he could use your support. The inspector and I will go looking for this monster."

I agreed. Holmes and Lestrade descended the stairs and I sat with a man who just a fortnight earlier had been on top of his world. Now I was looking at a man who, I was quite sure, wanted nothing more than to die.

For several minutes, neither of us spoke, then I inquired, as gently as I could. "Sam," I said, "how could you, of all people, do anything so foolish as to have an affair with your sister-in-law? You had Rev. Beecher looking down at you



every day reminding you not to give into the sins of the flesh. What happened?"

He looked vacantly out the window and then spoke to the sky beyond. "It is impossible to explain to anyone who has not been raised with an identical twin, how that can so alter every aspect of your life. As boys growing up Seth and I wore the same clothes, played with the same toys, attended school and Sunday school together, played all the same games at the same time. People spoke to us as if we were the same person. We were treated as if we had only one identity, not two. By the time we were in our teens we were thinking the same thoughts, finishing each other's sentences, and experiencing the same emotions whether anger, or joy, or sorrow, or whatever. It was not as if we had only one identity. We knew we were distinct from each other. But we were certainly not complete without each other. Marrying twin sisters, who had grown up in almost the same context as we had was absolutely logical. All of us understood each other in that way, a way that no one who has not had a twin ever can.

"Seth died suddenly last year. The only way in which we were not identical was that he had a weak heart and I did not. His heart failed last September and he collapsed at his desk and was dead. It was a terrible shock to all of us. I was simply no longer a complete man. I prayed about it over and over again, but the void did not go away. My dear wife, Sarah, felt the pain and anguish of her sister in a way that again cannot be explained to someone who has not seen a twin endure pain and felt it along with her.

"I spent many hours in Seth's home sorting out his estate and making sure that all his affairs were in order so that Mary could live comfortably. Seeing her in such pain was as if I was seeing my wife in that pain. I did what I would have done with Sarah and embraced her and let her cry against me. Soon we became intimate. Her face and body are exactly the same as my wife's. Mine are the same as her husband's.

“Somehow it did not seem wrong, merely an extension of our marriages. I know that cannot make sense, but that is what happened. It continued through the winter and into the spring. It has faded over the past few weeks as she has had to overcome her situation and face a new life without Seth. I know it was wrong. It was a sin before heaven and before my wife. Yet somehow, I feel no guilt. It was as if were my duty.”

“And how,” I asked, “are you going to explain it to your wife?”

He said nothing. I watched his face contort and again he buried his face in his hands. When he rose, he looked at me with an imploring look.

“Doctor Watson, I have only just met you and I know that you are not my brother in the Lord nor even a close friend. But you now know more of me than any other man on earth. I know it is the coward’s way out, but could I implore you, please, on my behalf, to go to my home and inform Sarah of all that has transpired. Please tell her everything. I will take a long walk through the Gardens and try to screw my courage to the sticking place and come home to her within two hours. Will you that for me, sir?”

There are some responsibilities that go with being a doctor and this, though unexpected, was clearly one of them. I agreed, gave him a warm pat on the shoulder, and turned to depart. Before doing so, I reached over and handed him the bottle of brandy. “You would not be the first man to need a little liquid support,” I said. “Nor will you be the last. You’re a good man, Sam Cushing. You have a wife and children who now need you more than ever.”

He took my hand and gave it a hard squeeze.

I walked slowly back to Ennismore Gardens, rehearsing what I was going to say with each slow step. I had learned in my many years in medical practice that the best way, indeed the only way, to impart devastating news to a patient was to speak the truth, the whole unvarnished truth, calmly, completely, and slowly, and then try to help in whatever

manner was required by the reaction of my patient. I would do the same now.

I entered the home and was greeted again by the manservant, Mr. Browner, and shown to the parlor. He inquired if I would like a cup of tea and perhaps some nourishment and I gladly accepted. My breakfast at Tiffany's having now been several hours ago, I was hungry. Some ten minutes passed before Mrs. Sarah Cushing appeared and sat down across from me.

In a matter-of-fact way, I explained the events of the morning. I told her first the disappointing news concerning our failure to find the children, the shock of learning that the terrible culprit was her brother-in-law, Alec Fairbairn, and the truth of the content of the blackmail and of her husband's infidelity. As I concluded, I detected a look from her that I had not expected. There was a touch of anger in her eyes and it was directed at me.

"Let us," she began in a firm voice, 'deal with the less significant matters first. You may think less of me for what I am about to tell you, Doctor Watson, and quite frankly, I do not care. However, I know and have known all along that my husband was giving intimate comfort to my sister. I wanted him to. I encouraged it. I made it as convenient as possible for him to do so."

I was stunned, and my face must have betrayed my reaction.

"Oh, please doctor, do not look so nonplussed. Surely, you must know from the medical literature concerning identical twins that we are simply not the same as other people, not even as other brothers and sisters or even fraternal twins. We share a part of our identity with our twin. I do with Mary just as Sam did with Seth. When Seth suddenly died last fall I could not only see the pain that my sister was suffering, I could feel it. To the depths of my soul, I knew what she was going through and I experienced it along with her. As I wept in my pain, Sam held me and comforted me as my loving

husband. I knew that the most loving thing I could do for my sister was to share him with her and let him do the same for her.

“So I did. I sent him over there several times a week to look after some household chore or some fabricated matter of Seth’s estate. I attended endless ladies’ prayer and sewing meetings –‘stitch and snitch’ I call them—on weekday evenings to make his absence convenient. When he returned in the evening to our bed I could smell her lavender perfume on his body and it gave me a sense of warmth and love toward him and I thanked God that I had been given such a gift of a loving and compassionate husband. As I said, Doctor Watson, I do not expect you to understand all of that, but it should not come as a complete shock to you if you have been reading your medical journals.”

I had read some about some of these phenomena but I had to ask about what I really could not comprehend.

“Speaking of God,” I said, calmly but firmly, “what I fail to understand is how you justify what has taken place before Him. You are people of severe faith and I do not believe that this type of behavior is allowed, regardless of the peculiarities of birth or of marriage.”

She looked back at me and did not flinch. “God, in His wisdom, make me and Mary twins and did the same for Seth and Sam. So, as far as I am concerned that is His problem to sort out. He can jolly well explain it to me when I get to heaven, and until that time, He will just have to live with it.”

Inside my head, I was shaking my head in amazement. I did not have an opportunity to respond before Mrs. Cushing turned to the other part of our conversation.

“I can also tell you, Doctor, that no matter what your brilliant friend, Sherlock Holmes, has deduced, there is something that does not make sense about arresting Alec Fairbairn for the kidnapping and torture of my children.”

“Would you mind, Mrs. Cushing, explaining what you just said?”

“I have known Alec all my life; first as a scholar in the same Sunday school and a member of the same church youth fellowship, and then for many years as my brother-in-law. He is greedy, wayward, foppish, worldly, angry, vindictive, and occasionally lazy. However, he is not a monster and he could never do to my son and daughter what has been done to them. That, sir, does not make sense and I cannot believe it.”

I knew enough not to argue. I had seen enough during my war years, in my medical practice, and in my observation of scores of cases of Sherlock Holmes, to know that the most horrendously unbelievable things could be done by the least suspected of persons. I said no more and thanked this quite unusual lady for the tea. The man-servant let me out and hailed a cab.

I returned to Baker Street, expecting to be able then to go to my practice. There was, however, a note waiting for me from Holmes. It ran:

Fairbairn apprehended mid-morning at Barings. On our way now to Scotland Yard. If possible, please join us immediately.

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# Chapter Seven

## The Wrong Right Man



It took about twenty-five minutes to get to the Yard building on the Embankment. I was ushered into Inspector Lestrade's office, where he and Holmes were sitting in silence. Holmes looked up at me as I entered.

"Our Mr. Fairbairn is clever enough to refuse to be interviewed without his lawyer being present and advising him. One has come over from the Middle Temple and is

meeting with him now. They sent a note saying that they will be ready to talk in two minutes from now."

On schedule a fellow, who I assumed to be a solicitor, entered, followed by a very nicely dressed and remarkably handsome gentleman of about forty-five years of age, who I assumed to be our culprit.

The lawyer opened the conversation. "Gentlemen, whatever evidence you have regarding charges of blackmail may be presented in court. I assure you that they will be challenged most vigorously. I fully expect that the case will be dismissed immediately. My much greater concern is the utterly slanderous and libelous false accusations that Mr. Sherlock Holmes has made against my client concerning the kidnapping and torture of the Cushing children. My client fervently denies any involvement or even any knowledge whatsoever of these matters. You have not a scrap of evidence linking him to this horrific crime and I demand that you drop all these utterly baseless charges immediately. While you, Inspector, are protected by your position in Scotland Yard, I can promise, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, that you will be sued endlessly and forever until you are bankrupt and unable to ply your amateur trade anywhere in England, or the Empire, or even America. Is that understood, sir?"

Sherlock Holmes had been threatened more times by more lawyers than I could count. This blustering pettifogger was nothing new. Holmes ignored him completely and spoke directly to Alec Fairbairn.

"Where are the Cushing children, Mr. Fairbairn? You have taken them and are harming them and I assure you that you will be spending the rest of your life in Newgate for doing so. And if you do not release them to us immediately then I assure you that you will end your life on a gallows."

"How dare you threaten my client!" exploded the lawyer. Holmes continued to treat him as if he did not exist.

"Alec," he continued, "They are your niece and nephew. They have never done you any harm, ever."



“Mr. Holmes,” said the accused in a puzzled tone, “I do not know what you are talking about. I know nothing whatsoever about Sam’s and Sarah’s children other than what I have read in the papers. I thought they had run off to enjoy the fun things in life that all youth should be able to enjoy, and to get out from under the fanatical yoke of religious oppression. What harm are you talking about?”

Here, Lestrade interrupted. He stood up and said, “Come with me please, Mr. Fairbairn, and bring your solicitor. Please follow me.”

“Where are you taking us?” demanded the lawyer.

“To the basement. The morgue is down there.”

We descended the stairs into a sub-basement and passed into the chilled unit in which bodies and, in our case, body parts were stored. We followed Lestrade over to a table that was covered with a cloth.

“Mr. Fairbairn,” he said. “This is what I am talking about. These are the appendages of the Cushing children that we believe you have removed and sent to their parents.”

In one long tug, he quickly removed the cloth, exposing the fingers, hands, feet, and forearms of Aaron and Miriam Cushing. He picked up one of the forearms and turned back to the accused and his lawyer, ready to wave it in their faces. The dramatic gesture was not necessary. I heard some anguished noises behind me and spun around in time to watch Alec Fairbairn drop to the floor in a faint and the lawyer make a beeline to a hand basin by the door, into which he hurled his breakfast.

Holmes said nothing as we made our way back to Baker Street. Upon entering our parlor, he immediately lit up his pipe, sat in his chair, pulled his legs up underneath his body and closed his eyes. I knew that he would remain in that position for hours as he went back over every detail we knew about this most horrible of cases and tried to put the disparate pieces together in his mind.

There was no point to any attempt on my part with conversation so I changed my clothes and departed to attend to my medical practice.

I returned by suppertime. Holmes sat at the table and picked at his dinner, saying nothing. At ten o'clock in the evening, a knock came to the door. I descended the stairs and received a note from a page boy. It was addressed to Sherlock Holmes. He opened it, read it, and handed it to me. It ran:

Thank you for arresting the wrong man. For a famous amateur detective, you most certainly are stupid, stupid, stupid.

For want of something to say, I offered an observation.

"Is there any chance that one of Moriarty's minions could be behind this? It would be in their character to taunt you, would it not?"

He looked at me and in a weary voice replied, "Yes. Moriarty himself may be dead but some of his web are still alive and active. And yes, it would be in keeping with their past actions to taunt me. But no, doctor, this is not his work. There is a tangle here that needs straightening out. Moriarty and his web of evildoers may have been enormously greedy for ill-gotten gain and power, and respect from the criminal world, but they would never stoop so low as to torture children. And, so far, there is no motive, no demand for material gain, nothing other than the inflicting of incredible pain on the children and their parents. No, my friend, we are not up against a master criminal. We are doing battle with an utterly depraved, evil, vile man. Whoever is behind this is unlike any monster I have ever fought. And so far, he is winning."

He said no more and I retired to bed. For the next three days, I filled my time with attending to my patients and forced myself to think of matters other than this horrible case. Late on the third evening, Lestrade came by to visit.

He was likewise looking exhausted and I knew that he had slept no more than had Holmes.

He entered and placed two more tarot cards on our table.

"*Temperance* and *The Sun*. Minus their left legs from the knee down. The box came with them. I had my men remove it before the family could look inside, but with the cards, they knew what it was. I am not sure how much longer they can bear up. I have placed one of our nurses in the home to keep watch. The mother is in such grief that I fear she might take her own life."

He walked over to the mantle and helped himself to a snifter and the bottle of brandy.

He sat down on the sofa, took a slow sip and let out a weary sigh. "I don't know about you Holmes, but in my thirty years in this business, I have never encountered anything so utterly diabolical. What can this devil possibly be wanting? What reason, then? If Fairbairn was not behind it with his blackmail demands, then who is?"

He looked at Holmes. For the past three decades, they had often been adversaries, never hesitating to give the other a competitive poke or take a strip off. Now they just looked at each other, both at a loss. It was as if they were hoping against hope that the other might have some flash of insight, some spark of brilliance that would lead them out of the morass in which they were mired.

There was no such relief.

Holmes simply shook his head and said nothing.

"What," queried Lestrade, "happens next? How far will he go?"

"The next step will be horrible disfigurement of their young bodies, and, then as a final painful indignity, he will murder them."

Lestrade sighed his forlorn agreement, rose, and departed.



## Chapter Eight

# The Press Learns All



**T**he next move was not what Holmes had predicted. It happened three days later and I ran into it as soon as I opened the door on to Baker Street first thing in the morning while on my way to my practice. Four newsboys from four competing newspapers were shouting at the top of their lungs. All were screaming about the gruesome dismemberment of the Cushing children. Somehow the

details of the story, which all the parties to it had kept under wraps, were now fully known to the press.

The responsible papers, of which we did have a small number, merely carried out factual reporting and gave the public the information about each letter, each tarot card, and each horrifying box delivered to the Cushings' house. The tabloids and even several of the broadsheets that had a sensationalist bent to their coverage expanded the stories with gut-wrenching speculative details about the slow and painful dismemberment process. The perceived screams of the young people as their fingers, hands, feet arms, and legs were slowly cut from their bodies were described in anguished colorful detail. Prints of the tarot cards were added to the stories with the appropriate appendages removed. Some went so far as to predict which body part would be subtracted from the victims next. I leave it to your imagination, as depraved and you can force it to be, to think on what parts they suggested.

That most depraved indignity to the human body that was predicted by the vermin in our tabloid press did, in fact, take place. Lestrade dropped by late in the evening several days later. He placed a single card on the table. It confirmed my worst possible fear. The card was *The Devil*, the fifteenth card of the Major Arcana. It depicts a young man and a young woman, both naked and chained around their necks and attached to the Devil. The young woman's breasts and young man's private parts had both been cut out.

"The box came to the house this evening," said Lestrade. "We were able to intercept it before the family could open it, but they saw the card and they know what has taken place. The lady has taken to her bed with brain fever and the father is bumbling around as if in an imbecilic daze. It is very hard on them. There was a note in the box. As cruel as you could imagine. Beyond imagining."

He placed the note on the table. It read:

No need to worry about blood loss. Cauterizing with a hot iron cures that.

“Any insights at all, Holmes? I confess, we are at a loss. Whoever is doing this must have some connection to either you or me for he seems to know exactly what our moves have been. Anything?”

Holmes shook his head. “No, my friend, there is nothing. Nothing. We are simply not dealing with our standard criminal. Not even a diabolical, brilliant mind like Moriarty. This is a lone-wolf and he is beyond evil and completely demented. I have not slept a wink and it looks as you have not either. All we can do is keep going. Keep going over the evidence. Keep trying to put our heads inside that of a monster.”

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders and rose, and made his way to our door.

“I will catch up with you tomorrow. I have asked the morgue to have all of the boxes put out for me in the morning. I am going to look them over one more time. It is likely pointless but you never know. You are welcome to join me.”

“I will do that,” said Holmes as Lestrade turned and descended our seventeen steps with a slow, heavy tread.

The following morning, I was again occupied with my patients, forcing myself one more time to direct my mind to anything other than this soul-destroying case. At ten o’clock, a page boy came bursting into my office and right into my examining room while I was checking over the prostrate body of an elderly woman. This was a terrible breach of rules and an embarrassing violation of the patient’s privacy. I shouted at the lad to get out.

To his credit, he did not. “I’m sorry, doctor. I’m so sorry, but I was ordered to get this to you no matter what. I’m sorry. It’s come from Scotland Yard. They said I had to get it to you and to interrupt you no matter what you were doing. Please sir, I’m terrible sorry.”

He handed me an envelope. As I opened it the dear older lady who was lying prone on her stomach on my examining table rolled over, covered her sagging body with the sheet and looked up.

“Owww, Scotland Yard, you say. Oh my, well that sounds a whole lot more fun than peering up me arse, don’t it, Doc? Well, don’t just stand there, boy, open it up and let’s see what you got.”

I tore open the envelope. The note inside, scribbled hastily in Holmes’s cramped handwriting, I read:

**Come immediately to the morgue. Now! Break in Cushing case. COME IMMEDIATELY!**

The dear woman had been looking over my shoulder as I read the note.

“Owww, Doc, you better get on your way. Don’t you worry about me. Probably nothing wrong that a bowl of prunes won’t fix. And don’t I have a story now to tell all me old biddies. None of them ever had their doctor called away on the case in the headlines while bare-arsed on the table. Away you go, Doc.”

I could not help smiling at her as I tore off my white coat and rushed out of the building. I stopped for just a few seconds to apologize to the patients sitting in my waiting room. The dear old patient’s voice rang out from my the examination room as I did so.

“On your way, m’boy! Don’t worry, I’ll tell them all about it. Best story we’ll have this week. Off you go!”

I leapt into a cab and shouted the destination to the cabbie. A smile appeared across his face and he laid a whip on the back end of his horse and we tore through the city. He quite seemed to enjoy being able to shout “Scotland Yard! Emergency!” repeatedly as we raced from Marylebone all the way to the Thames. I jumped out as soon as we arrived at the headquarters of the Yard, tossed the good fellow a sovereign, and ran into the building. The front desk was expecting me and immediately opened the doors down the



stairwells to the morgue. I was huffing and puffing and sweating by the time I got to the room where Holmes and Lestrade were waiting for me.

"Merciful heavens, Holmes," I gasped while trying to catch my breath. "What in the world is it?"

"We need you, my friend," he replied. There was almost a touch of happiness appearing on his face. "You are the doctor, we are not. But come, please. Take a look at all of the body parts. Use my glass. We have also prepared several slides. They are by the microscope. Look at them too.

"What am I supposed to be looking for?"

"Just look, and tell us if you see the same thing we think we might have."

I looked first at the section of lower leg than had been severed from Miriam Cushing and then at the corresponding piece from her brother, Aaron. There was nothing unusual. Both were obviously limbs from young bodies that one might expect from athletic healthy people. I looked up, perplexed, at Holmes, and Lestrade. They just smiled.

"Just keep looking, Watson," said Lestrade.

I moved on to the young woman's breast. Something did not make sense. I went back to her leg and then back to the breast.

Now I was on fire. I went quickly over all of the parts. Then I looked at the slides that had been prepared for the microscope. After ten minutes, there was no need for further examination.

"These are not from the same body. There must be three young women's bodies and three of young men. The skins, at first, appear similar, but skin has a signature. None are exactly alike. These are different from each other in very subtle ways, but they are different. This is madness."

I could not imagine that a single madman had abducted at least six young people and was torturing them all. It made no sense whatsoever.

“Ah, thank you, Doctor,” said Holmes. “It is what we thought but could not be sure. Thank you, my dear doctor.”

“Can we really be dealing with someone so vile as to dismember six young people? Is that possible?” I was at a complete loss.

Holmes and Lestrade looked at each other and gave a respected nod one to the other.

“No doctor, I think not. Let us propose an alternative hypothesis. Are there any resurrectionists still active around London?”

The question set me back. In the earlier years of the nineteenth century, a trade had developed that called itself *resurrectionists*. They were more commonly known as body snatchers. Medical schools had been opening across the country and there was a constant need of fresh cadavers for dissection and instruction in anatomy. For a number of years all sorts of graves had been violated, but then the Anatomy Act had been passed, requiring licensing of medical schools, and that was supposed to have put an end to the trade.

“That is a good question,” I said as I pondered an answer. “From time to time we in the medical profession hear rumors of the sale of bodies and body parts but no one has ever been arrested for it for years. No respectable, licensed medical school would be caught dead receiving cadavers from criminal sources.”

“And,” asked Lestrade, raising his eyebrows, “are all medical schools respectable and licensed?”

Most were, but of late, several privately owned businesses had opened their doors and called themselves *Medical Instruction Centers*. They had been advertising heavily across the Empire and had accepted many students from Africa, India, and the Caribbean colonies. Whatever certificate they offered was not worth the paper it was printed on in Great Britain, Europe, or America. But it was deemed to be legitimate and indeed valued in many of our more primitive colonies.

"There are," I replied, "several independent operations that are not governed by the medical councils. Yes. There are a few around London."

"How big are they?" asked Holmes. "How many students might be enrolled?"

"I only know from hearsay," I said, unsure of myself. "There is one operating down in Croydon that is said to have over 500 students: the *Santo Christobel School of Medical Care*. They charge every one of their students upwards of £500 a year. Seems to be quite a profitable going concern."

"Are they licensed to receive cadavers from the hospitals or the prisons?" asked Lestrade.

"I would think not," I said. "That entire area is quite tightly controlled. It did not used to be but now it is a felony to desecrate a corpse. Only approved institutions can receive cadavers for the teaching of anatomy."

"Well now, Holmes? Fancy a short trip down to Croydon?" asked Lestrade.

Holmes did not immediately reply, and then responded. "Yes, Inspector, but perhaps not in the daylight hours. If coffins and corpses are being transported around London, I presume it would be done after dark. Would you agree?"

"Right, that makes good sense, Holmes. So, what do you say? Meet up at dusk and pay a visit. Might not catch a delivery tonight, but I would wager we will snag one right soon. They must get them on a regular basis. I say we give it a try. Meet me at Victoria at seven this evening. I'll bring a couple of my bobbies along, just in case things get dicey."

"A capital idea," replied Holmes.

"And Holmes," continued Lestrade, "between now and then I am going home and having a jolly good nap. I suggest you do the same."

"The best idea you have had in years," replied Holmes and, to the relief of both of them, they laughed.

In the cab on the way home, Holmes was more reflective. "I have disciplined myself not to jump to optimistic

conclusions. It is always a dreadful temptation in this line of work. But my mind is suggesting quite strongly that the appendages that were delivered to the Cushing's home were not those of their children. There is a good chance that the youngsters are still alive and whole."

"Where?" I asked. It seemed to me to be inevitable next question.

"I have no idea," he replied. "But one step at a time might lead us to them."

# Chapter Nine

## Resurrection Night



**F**or the remainder of the day, I returned to my medical practice. My patients not only forgave me for making them wait for so long—many doctors do exactly the same thing all the time without offering any excuse at all, let alone being called for a command performance by Scotland Yard—they were all ears as soon as I returned, hoping for some juicy tidbit about the story that had so recently

exploded on the public. I played coy and told them they would just have to wait.

At dusk, we reassembled at Victoria and boarded the LB&SCR south to the East Croydon station. Lestrade had organized a police carriage and a couple of bobbies who were prepared to spend the night with us, watching the back door of a questionable medical education institution.

The school was located on Cross Street, which was, quite fortunately, just a block from the station. With time to spare, we took a few minutes for a bite in the Dog and Bull. A plaque on the wall informed us that King Henry VIII had dined here, but with which of his wives beside him, it did not say. Once darkness had fallen, we walked across the tracks and found a couple of benches that gave us a good view of the back entrance to the school. The publican had sent along a sack with some meats, fruits, and rolls and we chatted and nibbled for the next two hours. It was a warm late summer night and the company was pleasant. Holmes and Lestrade were both now much more relaxed than they had been just yesterday, and the two young bobbies, Carl and Freddie, were jovial chaps who found any excuse possible for a round of laughter.

It was going on to eleven o'clock when Holmes laid his hand on my forearm and bid us all keep our voices down. In the dim light from the moon and a solitary gas lamp we observed a livery wagon pulling up to the back door of the school. Lestrade rose and gestured to the rest of us.

"Follow me, please, gentlemen. Our plot appears to be unfolding."

From a vantage place alongside a hedgerow, we observed the back door of the school opening and three men emerging. Together with the liveryman, they lifted what were obviously coffins and carried four of them, one at a time, pallbearer style, into the building.

"Whatever the school is up to is not our concern this evening," whispered Holmes. "We need to learn the origin of

the cadavers that have arrived here.”

“Well now, sir,” offered Freddie, “I think we can find that out right fast for you, sir. With your permission, Inspector, we’ll just take a bit of a walk up to the driver and ask him, won’t we Carl?”

Lestrade nodded his approval and the two bobbies walked along the dark wall unseen until they were only a few feet from the wagon. One of the chaps from the school signed off on the delivery manifest and closed the door of the school. Carl and Freddie, doing what I assumed they had done many times before, were able to place themselves directly behind the driver and the moment he turned around he found himself staring right at them. Carl had his torch in hand and shone it directly in the poor fellow’s face while Freddie barked commands at him. The driver staggered back and fell to the pavement, quite obviously scared out of his wits.

“Right,” muttered Lestrade, “yet again I get a couple of comedians. But let’s go and chat with the man before he fills his boots.”

“I were not doin’ anythin’ wrong, I weren’t,” he was sputtering to the bobbies. “This is a right legal and all delivery, I weren’t disobeyin’ any law.”

“We will decide that, sir,” said Lestrade in a firm voice. “Scotland Yard, here.”

The look of panic on the chap’s face was pitiable, but a bit funny all the same.

“All we need to know,” said the inspector, “is who sent these coffins down here. It looks right suspicious coming in the middle of the night like this.”

“They always sends them at night, they do, sir. A wagon with a pile of coffins goin’ by gets all sorts of folks upset, especial when they can see that the wagon is loaded down so the coffins mustna be empty. I would a hae me a whole crowd of followers had I come in the daylight. This is just our common practice, sir.”

“Is it now?” continued Lestrade. “Well now, I do not find it common at all, so you might start by telling me where these came from. Getting rid of dead people in the middle of the night better have a good explanation.”

“I come down from the river, sir. From the Thames, sir. To be specific, sir, from the Grosvenor Canal by the Chelsea Bridge, sir. Right beside the ’ospital, sir. Here sir, look at the manifest. It’s right here, sir.”

Freddie held his torch on the paper that was shaking in the fellow’s hand. The sender was clearly identified. It read:

Grosvenor Marine Embalmers and Undertakers,  
Gatliff Road, Chelsea.

Lestrade and Holmes conferred for a few moments and then told the fellow to be on his way. He was much relieved.

“He will,” said Holmes, “no doubt report his being accosted by Scotland Yard to the senders when he sees them tomorrow. If it is not too inconvenient to you, gentlemen, and as it is a pleasant evening, I suggest we continue our quest back along the Thames. We should be able to catch the late train back to Victoria. From there is a very short distance to the canal.”

We returned to the station, boarded the 11:45 pm train back into London, and were on the platform of Victoria a half hour later. It was a short few blocks south to the Grosvenor Canal, one of the many waterways that had been dug during the canal era and now was used primarily as a convenient place to load and unload barges from the Thames. It was lined by warehouse buildings, none of which looked like an undertaker’s establishment. But, as the driver had told us, we found what we were looking for—a substantial brick building a half block from the Lister Institute.

I had, as a medical man, been in the Institute on several occasions in the past to listen to lectures by the renowned scientist, Sir Joseph Lister. Thanks to him, the practice of antiseptics had spread across the globe, saving untold



thousands of lives. I had not, however, been aware of an undertaker's service adjacent to the famous institution.

It was now past midnight and all of the doors were locked and the building closed for the night. It would not likely open much before seven in the morning if it was working on the same hours as the hospital. But that still meant we were faced with a wait of more hours than we wanted to spare. Holmes gave me a poke in the ribs and whispered in my ear.

"Isn't it time for your lunar lecture?" whispered Holmes.

I winked back at him.

"Now gentlemen," I said in a voice reserved for a public lecture, "do come with me and allow me to point out something that you have never, I assure you, seen before. Come this way. Now take a look up at the moon, nearly a full moon, is it not? Can you see the shaded spot on the upper left quadrant? That is not a crater, that is the eyeball of the man in the moon."

Lestrade and the bobbies had been following me out of curiosity up to that point. Now they looked at me as if I had gone completely barmy. The look did not last more than a second before Holmes called out to us.

"Oh, Look. The door is open after all. They must still be doing business. How fortunate. Let us go in and find them."

Lestrade gave me a sharp look and strode up to Holmes, he was attempting to be officious but his smile betrayed him.

"One of these days, Holmes, one of these days you are going to get yourself in deep trouble doing things like that."

"What? Me? In trouble? Never, I am the most law-abiding consulting detective in London, I'll have you know."

"Right," muttered Lestrade, "and since you are the *only* consulting detective in London that makes you also the least law-abiding."

He marched past Holmes and into the building. It did not take long for the bobbies to locate the light switches and soon the hallways were fully illuminated. We followed

Holmes down a stairwell to the basement, where he opened the door marked *Mortuary Cold Chambers*. A light switch was located just beside the door frame and we found ourselves looking at a large sterile room where three walls were lined with the metal panels of morgue drawers. The room itself was chilly and I could tell by looking at them that the glistening drawers were refrigerated. A few had frost on them, where bodies were completely frozen in order to prevent all decomposition. The remainder, and there were well over a hundred of them, were kept at a temperature just above freezing so that a corpse could be held for up to a month without any significant decomposition. A portion of the far wall consisted of much smaller morgue drawers than would be required for an adult man or woman. These, I realized, were for children.

"Crikey, what is this place?" whispered Freddie. "It's downright a bit creepy."

"Spooky, I'll say," added Carl. "Do all those drawers have dead folks in them?"

"Most of them, yes," said Holmes. "This is the establishment to which the bodies of those who die at seas are brought. Tens of thousands of children, men, and women, of all ages, board ships in Liverpool, Southampton, Portsmouth, or London on their way to the new world. Not all of them make it. Some invariably die on route. The shipping lines used to bury them at sea but now they are brought back to England and, if there is family that can be contacted, they are returned for a decent burial. Those who cannot be placed are made available to our hospitals and medical schools so that their cadavers may be used in the teaching of anatomy."

"Right," said Lestrade. "Rather a sort of central cadaver supply depot."

"I suppose you could call it that, yes."

"Right then, Holmes. What are we looking for? Some young bodies that could pass for the Cushing children?"

“Exactly. There should be six or seven. Young adults. Fair skin. All minus an appendage or two. Most likely they are grouped together, but that cannot be for certain. I suggest that we divide ourselves up and start pulling out morgue drawers.”

We set ourselves to the task at hand. As a doctor, I had viewed countless corpses in the past and looking at them was routine. Holmes, with his interest in forensics, had made many trips to the morgue, as had Lestrade in his years of service to the Yard. I suspected though that our two young bobbies had not likely been given an assignment like this before. I confess knowing that they should be warned that bumping the morgue drawers as you pulled them out occasionally released some tension in the chilled corpses, and they were known to move as the drawer was opened. But it was the middle of the night and a fine time for gallows humor, so I said nothing.

Carl and Freddie worked together at the far end of the room. They kept up a constant chatter between them, interspersed with nervous laughter. They were moving quickly, opening and closing drawers quite vigorously in their haste to finish the job. It was not long before one of them let out a scream of terror. I looked over and could see that a blue, naked body of an elderly man had sat up several inches and one of his arms had sprung forward. Freddie had run back to the door of the room and was looking as if he had seen a ghost. I could not help laughing as I walked over to the opened drawer, put my hand on the old fellow’s chest, pushed him back down, and closed up the drawer.

“You have to be gentle with these old folks, boys. They do not take kindly to being wakened up.”

After some muttered oaths, the young bobbies went back to work. Some ten minutes later, they were laughing uproariously.

“What’s the joke?” barked Lestrade. “You are expected to show respect for the dead. Now cut it out.”

“Sorry, Inspector,” said Carl. “It’s just that we’re assumin’ that the fellows who run this place are dealin’ some of the corpses out under the table, right? So Freddie here had a good idea as to how to let them know that doing so wasn’t on the up an’ up. He could just lie down in one of these drawers and have a nap until the proprietors show up and then when they pulls out his drawer he would sit right up and shout at them and say ‘I told you never to wake me up before ten. Now put me back!’ Don’t you think that would teach ‘em a lesson, Inspector, sir?”

We all laughed and we were still chuckling when Lestrade called out to us.

“Holmes, Watson, look here. There they are. I’ve just found three and ...” he continued to pull drawers open and leave them open as he spoke, “Yes. There’s the fourth ... and the fifth ... and six.”

We gathered around the six morgue drawers that were all exposed. In them were the bodies of three young men and three young women. The missing appendages all corresponded with the body parts that were stored in the police morgue at the Scotland Yard headquarters.

“Mark my words, Holmes,” said Lestrade, “this is the first time in my thirty years with the Yard that I have been happy to see six dismembered corpses.”

We stood briefly looking at the bodies of young men and women who had, not so long ago, boldly left their homes somewhere in old Europe and made their way to a new life across the ocean, only to succumb to accident, sickness, or possibly murder while at sea. Their remains were now destined to be dissected in the interests of medical education. I slowly closed up the morgue drawers and the group of us turned out the lights prepared to depart the building.

“Constables,” said Lestrade, “you remain here, and when the owners arrive, arrest them.”

Freddie turned to Lestrade with a distraught look on his face. "Oh, Inspector, sir, you're not going to make us stay here all night, are you? Sir, you can send me after bank robbers who are holdin' a Gatlin gun, sir, but this place, sir, it's just unnatural, sir. I'm goin' to be seein' that blue grandpa sittin' up and lookin' at me every time I close my eyes, sir. Do we have to spend the night here?"

Lestrade laughed and gave the young bobby a clap on his shoulder. "No, I suppose not. The two of you can just keep walking around the neighborhood until dawn and then come back once the owners arrive in the morning and bring them down to the station. That will do."

"Oh, thank you, sir."

It was now just past two o'clock in the morning on one of the final nights of August. The weather was balmy, with a breeze blowing in off the river. The streets of London were empty and it was almost pleasant to walk north back to Victoria Station. The relief we felt on confirming that the kidnapped children had not been inhumanly dismembered was palpable. Our work, however, was far from over.

"What happens, now?" I asked Holmes and Lestrade.

"The first thing," replied Holmes, "is to convey this news, very incomplete though it is, to the Cushing family. It will give them some relief from the pain and some basis for hope. Then we still have to find and rescue the children and try to make sense out of the monstrous and meaningless cruelty that has been inflicted on the family."

"There may," said Lestrade, wearily, "still be a ransom demand to come. This whole horrible series might just be the prolog."

We continued our walk in silence. Upon reaching Victoria Station, we were fortunate to find two cabs who were working through the night and we parted ways with Lestrade. We came home and fell into our beds. I was fairly certain that it was the first decent sleep Holmes had allowed

himself since this inexplicable case had begun two weeks ago.

# Chapter Ten

## We Did Not Get Ahead



I rose well after eight o'clock the following morning. I was pleased to see that Holmes had not yet stirred and I sat down quietly to enjoy my morning coffee. From the street, I could hear the newsboys peddling the morning papers and I descended to Baker Street to get a copy. As I unfolded it and read the front page, my heart sank. The headline read:

**HEADS OF CUSHING CHILDREN ARRIVE IN KNIGHTSBRIDGE**

The story that followed went on to claim that the press had discovered that the final tarot card, *The Judgement*, had been delivered, with the heads of the male and female figures removed. Since the previous punctured cards had all been accompanied by the related body parts it was assumed that the heads of the children had also been delivered. What followed was a repeating of the events of the past fortnight, fused with mindless speculations and nasty criticism of both Scotland Yard and Sherlock Holmes for failing to prevent this abominable crime of torture and murder.

"HOLMES!" I shouted at the door of his room. "You must come now!"

He emerged in his dressing gown, took one look at the newspaper I held in front of him, and immediately returned to his bedchamber to bathe and dress. Ten minutes later, we were in a cab and on our way to Knightsbridge.

"What are you going to say to the Cushings?" I asked him.

"I will tell them what we know, and no more and no less."

"And just what is it that we now know?"

"Oh, come, come, my good doctor. You know perfectly well what we know. We know that the body parts they received are not from their children and that they were taken from a morgue. And that is all we know for certain. We do not know where their children are nor why they have been kidnapped, nor why no ransom note has been received from the true kidnapper. And we have no idea who is behind this monstrous and cruel hoax. That is what we know and what we do not."

"Is it permissible to offer them hope?"

"They will grasp all possible hope without any assistance from us. We will also make a promise to them not to rest until their children are returned to them safely. I believe I will be on safe grounds in making that same promise on behalf of Inspector Lestrade. Would you agree?"

"Yes. Yes. That all seems quite in order."



As we turned onto the block of Ennismore Gardens in which the Cushing family lived I looked up the street and inwardly groaned. There was a large gaggle of reporters gathered in front of the house. Two of Lestrade's constables were keeping them back from the doors and windows but there was no possible way we could enter the house without running their gantlet. I chanced to look behind our cab and noticed a Scotland Yard carriage following us. The good inspector had clearly had the same compulsion to come immediately to the family's home and relieve them of the latest agony that the kidnapper and the press had inflicted on them.

Lestrade and Holmes exited their carriages at the same moment and were immediately swarmed by the press. Although we ignored them, it was impossible not to be cut by the jibes and insults.

"Halloo, Sherlock Holmes. How did the kidnapper get A... *HEAD* of you?" Raucous laughter followed.

"Hey there, Inspector. What will Scotland Yard put on the gravestones? How about *REST IN PIECES!*"

"Are your going to ask the corpses to *GIVE YOU A HAND?*" This was deemed oh-so-clever and there was a round of self-congratulatory back-slapping. More taunts followed until we entered the house. The man-servant, Mr. Browner, led us into the parlor. He stood at attention and bid us be seated.

"I'm dreadfully sorry, gentlemen. The master and mistress are in the library along with some of the elders from the Assembly. They are having a time of prayer. I do not expect they will be much longer. May I bring you some coffee and some pastries while you wait?"

"Good heavens, man," snapped Lestrade. "Just go and interrupt them and tell them to get in here. This is much more important and I am sure God will not object."

"Yes, sir. Of course, sir. I will interrupt as soon as the current participant has finished his prayer. But do be patient, they tend to go a long time."

He clicked his heels again and retreated to the back of the house.

It was a full ten minutes before a small troop of prayer warriors emerged from the library and joined us in the parlor. Mrs. Cushing was with them, supported on the arm of one of the saintly sisters. Samuel Cushing brought up the rear and looked as physically drained as I had ever seen a man who was still on his feet and walking forward.

They apparently had all decided to be part of our disclosures and took chairs around the sides of the spacious parlor. Once Mr. Cushing had seated himself beside his wife on the sofa, I could see that Inspector Lestrade was ready to take command of the meeting. He did not speak up quickly enough. One of the gentlemen from the church announced that the gathering would begin with prayer and he stood and began to deliver. Being a somewhat less-than-regular adherent of the Catholic faith, I was not used to prayers that lasted more than a minute. Now I sat and listened while the good Lord above was reminded of more verses of Scripture than I could have imagined could have been called upon in such a time of need. I confess that I had always thought the Heavenly Father, having dictated all those verses Himself, knew all those passages quite well, and needed no reminders. If that were not enough, the dear saintly elder kept blessing the now departed souls of the dead children and gave a favorable report of their current joy as they walked the streets of gold. And finally, he managed to come up with a memory verse that was connected in some way to the various parts of the bodies that had been detached and shipped through the local livery service. A postscript was added beseeching divine guidance for both Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Lestrade who, it was to be concluded, were obviously in desperate need of same.

With the exception of Holmes, Lestrade and me, all others in the room kept their heads bowed and their eyes tightly shut. The three of us kept peering at each other in silence,

rolling our eyes, shrugging our shoulders, and waiting until the heavens put the dear brother on hold and let us say our piece. Finally he ended and a round of audible *amens* was added by the other elders present.

Lestrade seized the opportunity and in a firm, confident voice announced, "Please, all of you, give me your attention. The various body parts that have been delivered to the Cushing family are absolutely and most certainly NOT from the bodies of young Aaron and Miriam Cushing. They were illegally taken from bodies in a morgue and used to falsely represent appendages of the children. This we know for certain. Those who defiled the corpses have been arrested and this cruel charade has been stopped. No heads from any bodies have been delivered and we are certain that no heads ever will be delivered.

"At this time, the investigation is receiving all available help from Scotland Yard as well as the services of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. We do not yet know where the children are, nor who has taken them, nor what sort of ransom will be demanded, nor why this monstrous hoax has been played out. However, we will continue to work around the clock to answer all of those questions and our first priority will be the safe return of the children to their families.

"Now, Scotland Yard needs to ask further questions of the family and so I am directing all of you, except members of the Cushing household, on the authority of His Majesty's national police force, to vacate these premises immediately so that our investigation may proceed. Thank you for your generous and compassionate assistance to the family. Now, please, all of you, be on your way. Thank you."

One of the sainted brethren objected. "I beg to inform you, Inspector, that we have had word from the Lord that we should be here and ..."

Lestrade was having none of that and cut him off. "Unfortunately, sir, the Lord has not yet got around to sending that word to me, and since this is now police

business I am the one He has to inform. So kindly do as I have requested and vacate the premises, thank you. Your assistance to the family is appreciated."

He rose as he spoke, moved to the entrance to the parlor, and gestured toward the door. The saints from the Assembly, somewhat begrudgingly perhaps, rose and left the house. From a gap in the curtains, I could see the press descend upon them like hungry locusts. I was sure that they would repeat to the press what they had been told by the inspector, and that the news would appear in the next available edition of the day's newspapers.

The man-servant appeared with yet another round of coffee, tea, and sweet breads. We partook while Lestrade slowly and patiently repeated questions that had been posed earlier to the family, seeking to unearth whoever had both a close connection to the household and might harbor such venomous hatred toward them.

Samuel Cushing kept going back over his life and career. Yet no credible suspect emerged. "I have had," he said, "strong disagreements with many senior men in Whitehall and many elected representatives in Westminster. But there was no one, not a one, who was not an honorable gentleman, who would take it upon himself to act in such an evil manner. Not a one, sir."

When Lestrade had shot his bolt and come up empty, Holmes took over and directed his questions, firmly but gently toward both Mr. and Mrs. Cushing. His queries were politely stated but went right to the very depths of their private lives.

"Forgive me," he said, "but we can leave no stone unturned. I assure you that whatever you say to us will be held in the strictest confidence, but I fear I must ask you some questions and the answers may be painfully private."

The two Cushings looked at each other nodded, then turned and nodded to Holmes. I made a point of closing up my notebook and putting it back in my pocket.

Over the next hour, he probed all aspects of Mr. Cushing's career in the Foreign Service, his friendship and possible conflicts within his church and the affiliated Assemblies, his purchases of properties or securities, and his dealings with the schoolmasters of his children. All of these areas, Holmes had learned, were fertile ground for deeply held conflicts between and among people. He then turned to Mrs. Cushing and did the same. She gave forthright answers about her friends within the church and those with whom she had tangled, about her hiring and firing of domestic help, about her dealings with local councils, neighbors, dustmen, grocers, and the like. Again, she clearly held nothing back and admitted to occasions when her temper had gotten the better of her. There had been the odd spot of friction, which was not surprising given her strong-willed character, but nothing that could conceivably invoke the cruel animosity to which they had been subjected.

Finally, Holmes went directly to the matter of the confession that Mr. Cushing had made over a week ago. The man blushed with shame as he recounted it in front of his wife. She never stopped looking up at him in love and adoration, although he was not looking back at her. She slowly slid her hand forward until it was against his and interlaced their fingers. I could see her knuckles whiten slightly as she applied pressure against his fingers. He turned and looked into her face and she whispered, "Darling, I know. And I love you all the more."

Yet again, without visibly appearing to do so, I was mentally shaking my head. There were some things I would never understand. Lestrade, who had not been privy to the earlier conversation between Holmes and Samuel Cushing, was speechless and rendered positively bug-eyed.

Finally, Holmes looked directly at Mrs. Cushing and asked if she had ever had a lover.

She first looked up at her husband, smiled warmly, and then replied to Holmes.

"Yes...and no. It would not be accurate to call him a lover."

Her husband's eyes nearly popped from his head.

She smiled back. "When my sister was in her final month of pregnancy, and then during the first month after giving birth to her son, she was in no mood whatsoever for physical intimacy with Seth. She and I knew that both Seth and Sam had been blessed with powerful animal spirits of which we were the fortunate beneficiaries, but we also knew that the time when a young husband is most likely to stray was during those months when his wife was not looking after his needs. So we chatted about it, and for a period of about two months, I agreed to pretend to be her and make sure that Seth was duly exhausted on a regular basis."

"And did your sister," Holmes asked, "reciprocate during your pregnancies?"

"Oh, no. It was not necessary. My husband followed the advice that is given to all men by their doctors during that time of their lives. You know—*if you wife cannot be your right hand, let your right hand be your wife.*"

Sam Cushing looked at his wife in disbelief. "You knew ... you *knew* I was doing that?"

"Well, of course, darling. You were not exactly quiet about it."

I could see Lestrade becoming progressively less comfortable and he began to squirm in his chair. Holmes finally wound down his questions and the five of us sat back in our chairs, emotionally exhausted. This devout couple who sat in front of us had bared the most intimate details of the souls to us and to each other. Tears were running freely down Mrs. Cushing's face and she had placed both hands around her husband's arms and was clinging tightly.

I shot a quick glance out the window and was relieved to see that the press had departed, required no doubt to run back to Fleet Street to file their stories about the body parts

from the morgue. Our path out and into Lestrade's police carriage would be mercifully unobstructed.

While I was looking, Holmes and Lestrade were concluding the interview and going over a few of the answers they had received to make certain that they had understood everything correctly.

We were loudly interrupted.

The front door of the house opened, followed by a clatter and banging, and then the slamming of it shut again. And then a shout.

"Haaaalloooo!! We're hooome!!!"

# Chapter Eleven

## Kidnapped to Guernsey



**A**fter a few more bumps, bangs and crashes two young people burst into the parlor.

"Oh, Daddy," bubbled the young woman, "it was absolutely brilliant. Thank you sooo much. We had a wonderful time. It was the best, Daddy. Thank you."

The slender, tanned youngster threw herself forward toward Mr. Cushing, flung her arms around him, and gave him a large, noisy kiss on the cheek.



“Muuuaaahhh!” she added a sound to her kiss. She then turned to face Mrs. Cushing and repeated the affectionate act.

Immediately behind her came a tall, fine-looking young man. Like his sister, he was casually but smartly dressed, tanned, and beaming with a smile from ear to ear.

“Dad, thanks. That was the best surprise we could ever imagine. It was great.”

Here he stopped, suddenly becoming aware that there were three strangers in his parlor.

“Oh, oh. I’m sorry. Are you having a meeting? Oh, sorry. We’ll be on our way. But we just had to tell you, thank you. It was bang up the elephant. There were fellows and girls from all over Europe and America. Miri and I have never had such a good time.”

“Oh, my, didn’t we though,” exclaimed the young woman. “You should have seen how well we did. You would be sooo proud of us. My brother won the harrier race. He won, Mommy, doesn’t that just take the egg! There were boys from all over the place, and he won. I was sooo proud of him.”

“Ahh, it wasn’t all that special” returned the young man. “Some of the Swiss boys could run, but the rest of them, the French and the Italians, they may as well of had no feet and been running on their stumps. But you should have seen Miriam. She took two prizes. She won the girls swim and the girls hundred yard dash. Of course, they wouldn’t let the boys watch up close, but I could tell it was her. She won two trophies. You must show them to Mommy and Dad, Sis. Go get them!”

“Oh, good idea. Sorry, I know we’re disturbing your meeting. But I just have to show them to you. Can we put them on the mantle, Daddy? Just wait I’ll be right back.”

She dashed out of the room, grabbing her suitcase as she entered the hall and I could hear the loud thumps of her ascending the stairs, two at a time.

“Oh, and Dad,” rattled on the lad. “It wasn’t all just fun and games and a big benjo. The speakers were really top-drawer, especially the chap from Georgia, in America. We poked a bit of fun at the way he talked but, whoa, could he preach. And Dad, you’ll be sooo proud of Miriam and me. They put us on the same Bible Quiz team. She didn’t like that at all because she was quite taken with Jeremy, from Edinburgh and wanted to be on his team ...”

“And you ... came a voice from the second floor, were pretty sweet on Tabitha, your cute little chica bonita from Madrid.”

The whirlwind did not let up. There had not been a chance for a single word from one of the adults present. The young man blushed and shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, yes, well her. But on the Bible quiz they put Miri and me on the same team, and dad, we killed them. Quite knocked the blocks off the other teams. They gave us both brand new Scofield Bibles as prizes.

“Mommy?... Daddy?” came the voice from up the stairs again. “What are these doing on my dresser?”

She came back into the room wearing a very perplexed look on her face and holding in her hands two envelopes.

“These were on my dresser. One is a letter to you, Daddy. The other is addressed to...to Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

Holmes immediately stood up and approached the young woman. “I am Sherlock Holmes. You may give that letter to me.”

The lad immediately jolted around and stared at Holmes. “*You* are Sherlock Holmes? In *our* house? Sherlock Holmes is in our house? That ... that takes the biscuit. Daaaad? Are you helping Sherlock Holmes solve one of his mysteries? Is that why the two mutton-shankers were standing out on the pavement? That’s the best yet. Gosh, Mr. Holmes, this takes the Huntley. All my friends have read all your stories. Michaelmas starts next week. That will be so spot on for me to be able to tell them that my father is helping Sherlock

Holmes. Gosh, Dad, you really are full of surprises this summer. We thought we were going to be in morbs all month with you not letting us go to Guernsey for the youth conference, and then at the last minute you did, and now we come home and you're helping Sherlock Holmes."

He walked over to his father, who was still seated and had yet to say anything, and playfully put his hand on his father's forehead.

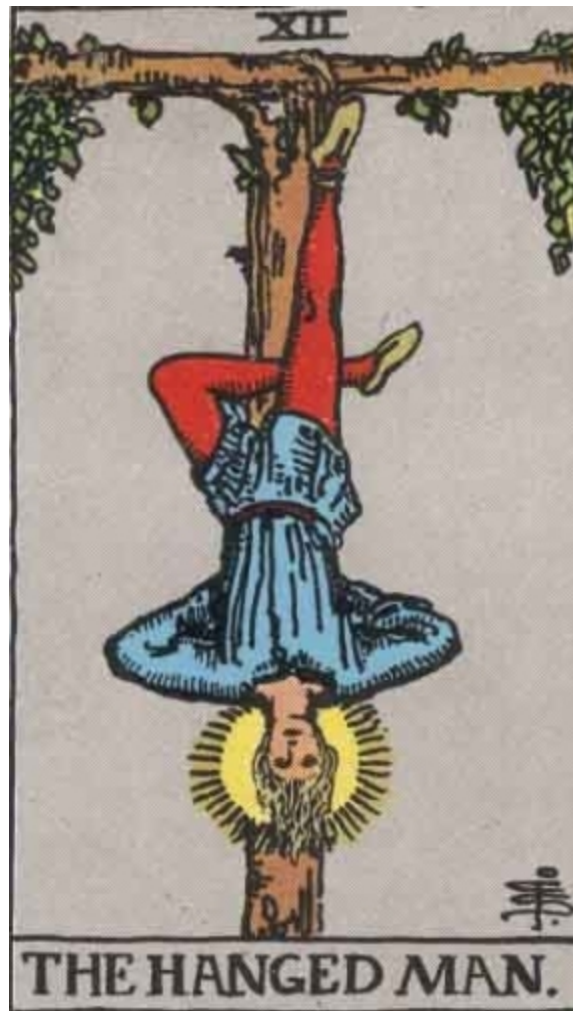
"Are you feeling all right, Dad? Did something happen, Momsy, when dad turned fifty?" He laughed playfully.

Then he looked back at Lestrade and me. "Are you Dr. Watson? And, you, sir, why you must be Inspector Lestrade. Oh, this is absolutely tooo much. Oh, I'm sorry this must be an important meeting we've interrupted. Let's go, Sis, race you to the loo."

With that the young man and young woman crashed and stomped and laughed on the way up the stairs and five adults were left in the parlor, completely walloped.

## Chapter Twelve

### This Circle of Misery



**M** r. Cushing opened the letter addressed to him, and Holmes did likewise. Inserted into Mr. Cushing's letter was a tarot card - *The Tower*, in flames, with bodies falling from it. Inserted into Holmes's card was *The Fool*.

**The letter to Mr. Samuel Cushing. With copy to Mr. Sherlock Holmes:**

By the time you read this you will have known for a mere three weeks something of the pain and suffering that I, my sister, and my mother have endured for the past thirty years – all because of you, Mr. Samuel Cushing.

In 1884, my father was a brave and loyal young officer in the B.E.F. and proudly serving under one of our country's most heroic leaders, General Charles Gordon. My father belonged to the regiment of courageous men who defended the garrison and loyal subjects in Khartoum. He sent letters back to us, assuring us that reinforcements were on their way and that he would soon be home, safe and sound.

Those reinforcements never arrived. My father died on the night of 25 January, 1885 when the city he and his fellow soldiers was defending was besieged by the Mahdi. The reinforcements arrived two days later.

Do you know how my father died, Mr. Cushing? He was tortured. One by one, his fingers, his hands, his feet, his arms, his legs, and his genitals were cut off. Finally, they cut off his head. When his coffin arrived back in England two months later, no one warned us not to open it and bid our final respects to a brave man and wonderful loving husband and father. Inside the coffin were the various parts of his body, in no order. His severed head was looking up at us from the middle of the box. I have never been able to get the terror of that moment to leave my mind. My dear mother went partially mad. She lived out her life on a meager widow's pension, cared for by the saints of the Methodist Church. My sister was disturbed for years, finally pulling her wits back together and marrying a widower when she was past forty. She now lives in some god-forsaken corner of Canada where I can only hope that the freezing temperatures have numbed her memory.

For my part, in honor of my father, I joined the B.E.F. and have served proudly all over the world. Every time I returned to England I did some more research and sought to learn just what had happened at Khartoum and why an entire

regiment and ten thousand inhabitants of the city who were loyal to the Queen were allowed to be slaughtered. At first, I put the blame on Gladstone, but as I learned more, I understood that he and his cabinet acted on the advice and information provided to them by their mandarins in the Foreign Office. The oh-so-brilliant Cambridge man who had the Egypt-Sudan desk was named Samuel Cushing.

It was you, Mr. Cushing, that gave false and misleading information to the Cabinet. It was you who was responsible for the horrible death of my father and the destruction of my family.

When I retired from the B.E.F., I determined that somehow I would avenge the death of my father and I watched your home constantly. I saw how you had prospered, and risen at Whitehall, and become so respected as a Christian. As far as I am concerned, you are no more than a whited sepulcher.

I befriended your former man-servant and learned of your so-called ministry given to the household help. It was an easy thing to feign drunkenness and stroll into your gospel meeting and then to profess salvation through your fanatical faith. And so you hired me as your butler.

I watched you for days and soon discovered your adulterous relationship with your sister-in-law. You wretched hypocrite. You who stand up every Sunday morning and lead in prayer for the bread and the wine. You are a lecher and the world should know. Unfortunately, your foolish brother-in-law, Fairbairn, was greedy and stupid and used the information I gave him to blackmail you instead of exposing your hypocrisy to the world.

Undeserving though you are, you were blessed with exceptional children and it was not difficult to gain their confidence. All spring and summer they begged you to let them attend the European Conference for Christian Youth that was to be held in August on the Island of Guernsey. You refused on some nonsensical ground of not wanting them to

be unequally yoked with those who were not your special type of believers.

So I sent in their registrations and intercepted the confirmations. I made the travel arrangements, and when they were returning from their Bible study I drove up to them, their bags packed, and announced that you had had a change of heart and had agreed to let them go. They were over the moon. But we had to rush. We sped to Victoria and from there to Portsmouth. By the time you were searching Kensington Gardens, they were on the night ferry across the Channel.

And then, Mr. Cushing, for the next three weeks you had a taste of what I, my sister, and my mother endured. You could feel the horror, the pain, the agony in your heart of knowing that those members of your family, those you loved so dearly, were being horribly tortured and put to death.

The appendages you received were not from your children, as you now know. They were, as Sherlock Holmes and Scotland Yard finally deduced, from bodies of young men and women who had already died and whose cadavers could be bought for a few quid under the table.

Now you have your children back. You are lucky. My father never returned, except in pieces. Now you can put your brief time of agony behind you. We never will.

By the time you read this, I will have departed England and be on the high seas.

Do not bother trying to find a Mr. Jim Browner.  
He does not exist.

Lestrade and I had been reading over Holmes's shoulder. Mrs. Cushing had been doing the same over her husband's. We all finished reading at the same time and looked up at each other. Without speaking, Holmes, Lestrade and I rose and prepared to leave the room. I stepped over to Samuel Cushing and shook his hand. Lestrade and Holmes did not.

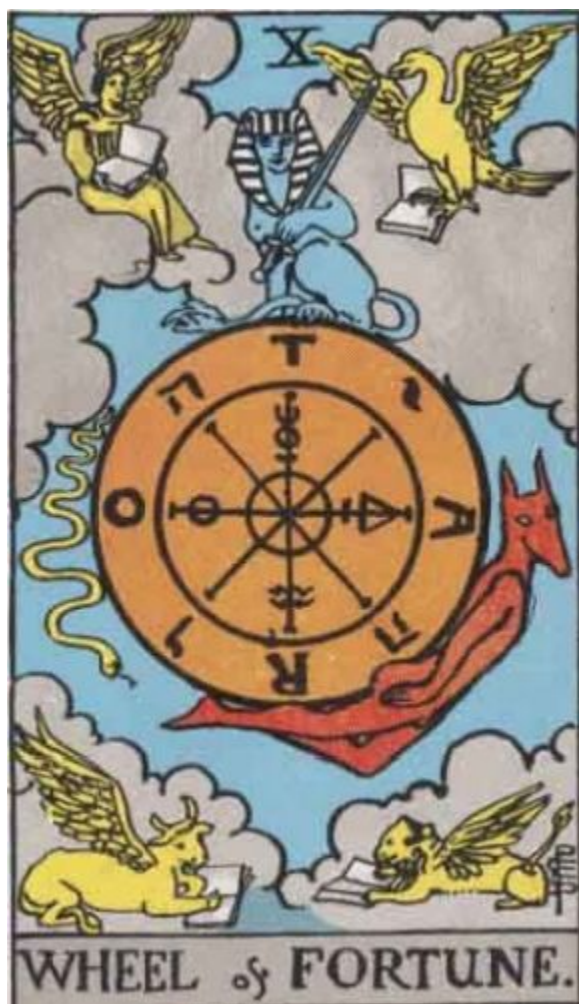
That evening marked the arrival of the cool evenings of the late summer. Holmes and I sat by the hearth, lit for the first time since the spring. Holmes took the letter from his suit pocket and read it, and read it again.

“What is the meaning of it, Watson?” said Holmes solemnly as he laid down the paper. “What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. But what end? There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever.”



**Did you enjoy this story? Are there ways it could have been improved? Please help the author and future readers of future New Sherlock Holmes Mysteries by posting a review on the site from which you purchased this book. Thanks, and happy sleuthing and deducing.**





# Historical Notes

The Russo-Japanese War took place in 1904 – 1905. The Japanese soundly defeated the Russians. The ownership of a few islands that are part of the archipelago between Hokkaido and Kamchatka is still disputed.

Tarot Cards emerged as a set of playing cards in fifteenth century Europe. They were adopted by occultists for use in divination in the eighteenth century and are still used widely for that purpose. The Rider Waite edition of the cards, designed by illustrator Pamela Coleman Smith, was created in 1909 and has been the most popular version of the cards since that time. In this story, *The Box of Cards*, the date of publication has been advanced.

The violation of fresh graves for the purpose of procuring cadavers for anatomy classes was quite common during the first half of the nineteenth century. The practice was curtailed by the Anatomy Act but sporadic incidences took place for many decades afterwards. The morgue for bodies of those who die at sea is fictional.

The Darbyites were a branch of the Plymouth Brethren movement and they, along with other branches of the Brethren Assemblies are still to be found throughout the world.

References to locations, roads, buildings and institutions in London in 1905 are generally accurate.

# Acknowledgments

Like all writers of Sherlock Holmes fan fiction, I owe a debt to Arthur Conan Doyle. Or, if you are a true Sherlockian, to Dr. John Watson who recorded the brilliant exploits of the world's most famous detective. This particular story is a tribute to the original story, *The Cardboard Box*, and borrows liberally from the plot, character, vocabulary, and even entire sentences.

A special thanks is given to Mr. Dennis Martin of Pinehurst, North Carolina, an enthusiastic reader of *New Sherlock Holmes Mysteries*. He made some delightful and creative suggestions for this story and they have been duly included.

The illustrated tarot cards are from the 1909 Rider Waite edition, illustrated by Pamela Coleman Smith.

As in previous books in this series, I gratefully acknowledge my debt to my high school English teachers and university professors who encouraged a love of reading and writing, and instructed me in the basics of grammar and composition. And again, I acknowledge the dear friends and family who continue to encourage me in this pleasant if quixotic quest of writing a new mystery to correspond to every story in the original Canon.



# About the Author

In May of 2014 the Sherlock Holmes Society of Canada – better known as The Bootmakers ([www.torontobootmakers.com](http://www.torontobootmakers.com)) – announced a contest for a new Sherlock Holmes story. Although he had no experience writing fiction, the author, Craig Stephen Copland, submitted a short Sherlock Holmes mystery and was blessed to be declared one of the winners. Thus inspired, he has continued to write new Sherlock Holmes mysteries since and is on a quest to write a new mystery that is inspired by each of the sixty stories in the original Canon. He currently lives and writes in Toronto, Tokyo, and Manhattan. More about him and contact information can be found at [www.SherlockHolmesMystery.com](http://www.SherlockHolmesMystery.com).

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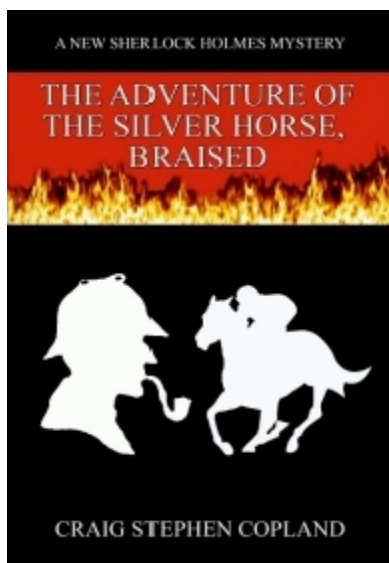


***The Adventure of the Beryl Anarchists.*** A deeply distressed banker enters 221B Baker St. His safe has been robbed and he is certain that his motorcycle-riding sons have betrayed him. Highly incriminating and embarrassing records of the financial and personal affairs of England's nobility are now in the hands of blackmailers - the Beryl Anarchists - all passionately involved in the craze of motorcycle riding, and in ruthless criminal pursuits.

And then a young girl is murdered.

Holmes and Watson must find the real culprits and stop them before more crimes are committed - too horrendous to be imagined.

This new mystery was inspired by *The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet* and borrows the setting and some of the characters. And, of course, our beloved Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are there, just as they are in the original Canon.



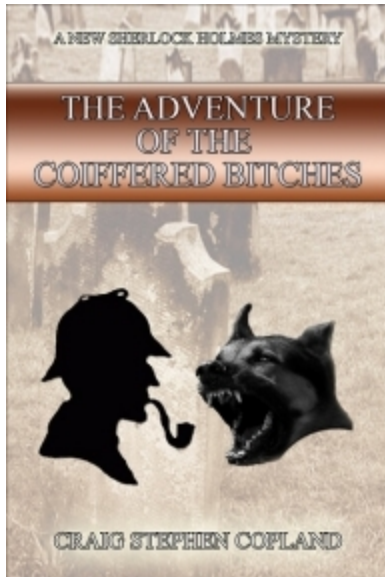
***The Silver Horse, Braised.*** The greatest horse race of the century, with the best five-year-olds of England running against the best of America, will take place in a week at Epsom Downs. Millions have been bet on the winners. Owners, jockeys, grooms, and gamblers from across England arrive. So too do a host of colorful characters from the racetracks of America.

Before the race, everything appears to be in order. The race is run and an incredible white horse emerges as the winner by over twenty-five lengths. Celebrations are in order and good times are had. And that night disaster strikes. More deaths, of both men and beasts, take place. Holmes identifies several suspects and then, to his great disappointment and frustration, he fails to prove that any of them committed the crime. Until . . .

This completely original mystery is a tribute to the original Sherlock Holmes story, Silver Blaze. It also borrows from the great racetrack stories of Damon Runyon. Fans of both of these wonderful writers will enjoy seeing Holmes, Watson, and Lestrade – assisted by Harry the Horse, Little Miss Marker, Sorrowful, and the nameless narrator – as they finally bring the culprits to justice.



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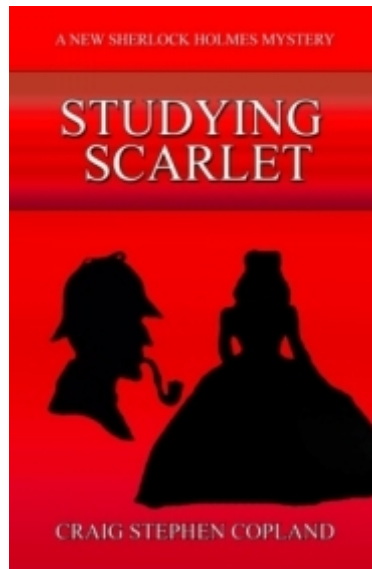


***The Adventure of the Coiffured Bitches.*** A beautiful young woman will soon inherit an lot of money. She disappears. Her little brother is convinced that she has become a zombie, living and not living in the graveyard of the ruined old church.

Another young woman - flirtatious, independent, lovely - agrees to be the nurse to the little brother. She finds out far too much and, in desperation seeks help from Sherlock Holmes, the man she also adores.

Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson and Miss Violet Hunter must solve the mystery of the coiffured bitches, avoid the massive mastiff that could tear their throats, and protect the boy.

The story is inspired by the original Conan Doyle *The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*. Fans of the original Sherlock Holmes will enjoy seeing the same characters in a brand new murder mystery.



***Studying Scarlet.*** Starlet O'Halloran (who bears a distinct resemblance to the South's most famous heroine) has arrived in London looking for her long lost husband Brett. She and Momma come to 221B Baker Street seeking the help of Sherlock Holmes. Three men have already been murdered, garroted, by an evil conspiracy.

Unexpected events unfold and together Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, Starlet, Brett, and two new members of the clan have to vanquish a band of murderous anarchists, rescue the King and save the British Empire. This is an unauthorized parody inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.

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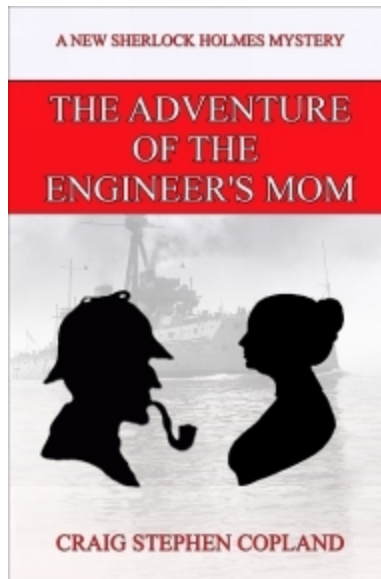
## ***The Adventure of the Spectred Bat.***

A beautiful young woman, just weeks away from giving birth, arrives at Baker Street in the middle of the night. Her sister was attacked by a bat and died and now it is attacking her.

Could it be a vampire sent by the local band of Gypsies? Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are called upon to investigate. The step-father, the local Gypsies and the furious future mother-in-law are all suspects. And was it really a vampire in the shape of a bat that took the young mother-to-be's life? This adventure takes the world's favorite detective away from London to Surrey north to the lovely but deadly Lake District.

**If you enjoy both stories about Sherlock Holmes and about vampires, you will love this one.**

The story was inspired by the original Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* and like the original, leaves the mind wondering and the heart racing.



***The Adventure of the Engineer's Mom.*** A brilliant young Cambridge University engineer is carrying out secret research for the Admiralty.

**It will lead to the building of the world's most powerful battleship, The Dreadnaught.**

His adventuress mother is kidnapped and having been spurned by Scotland Yard he seeks the help of Sherlock Holmes.

Was she taken by German spies, or an underhanded student, or by someone else? Whoever it was is prepared to commit cold-blooded murder to get what they want.

Holmes and Watson have help from an unexpected source – the engineer's mom herself.

This new mystery is inspired by the original Sherlock Holmes story – The Engineer's Thumb. It is set in the same era in England and you will encounter several of the original characters, but now in a completely new traditional Sherlock Holmes mystery.

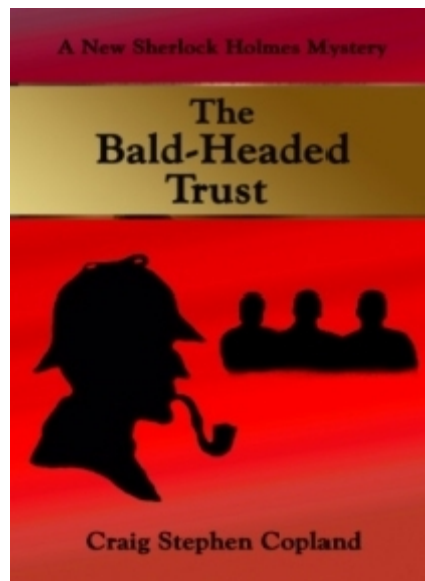
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***The BaldHeaded Trust.*** No sooner has Sherlock Holmes arrived in Plymouth for a short vacation enforced by Dr. Watson than he finds himself in the middle of an unsolved crime – the Telegraph Murders. Two electrical engineers were found dead after completing a contract for the new Western Union telegraph office.

Holmes's very unusual helper in this case is an exceptionally pious – but still attractive even if sturdily built – woman who, with her husband, is the proprietor of a Christian bookstore.

Some evil genius – and the true Sherlockian can easily guess who – is behind a scheme to rob shareholders of millions of pounds and is prepared to commit murder to make sure the diabolical plan works. Holmes, Watson and his new recruits must first deduce what is going on and then some the crime.

Readers who are sympathetic to devout Christian believers will enjoy seeing some saintly folks help the world's greatest detective.

Lovers of Sherlock Holmes mysteries will enjoy this new story, written today but as faithful as possible to the

characters, heroes, villains, language, and setting of the original Sherlock Holmes.



***The Adventure of the Notable Bachelorette.*** A snobbish and obnoxious nobleman enters 221B Baker Street demanding the help of Sherlock Holmes in finding his much younger wife – a beautiful and spirited American from the West.

Three days later the wife is accused of a vile crime. Now she comes to Sherlock Holmes seeking his help to prove her innocence so she can avoid the gallows.

Neither noble husband nor wife have been playing by the rules of Victorian moral behavior.

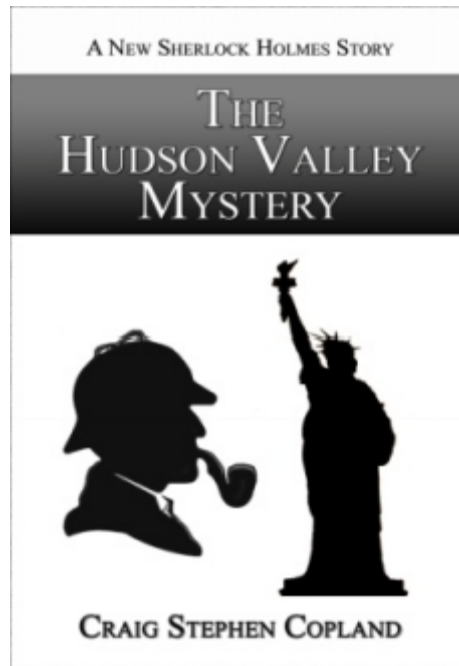
So who did it? The wife? The mistress? The younger brother? Someone unknown?

Fan of Sherlock Holmes will enjoy this mystery, set in London during the last years of the nineteenth century, and written in the same voice as the beloved stories of the original canon. This new mystery was inspired by the original Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor*.

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***The Hudson Valley Mystery.*** Dr. Watson and his wife are enjoying a peaceful breakfast when a note arrives

from Sherlock Holmes inviting them on a journey to New York City. A terrible tragedy has taken place in the Hudson Valley, just north of the great metropolis. A young man confessed to having murdered his father, and then he went stark raving mad.

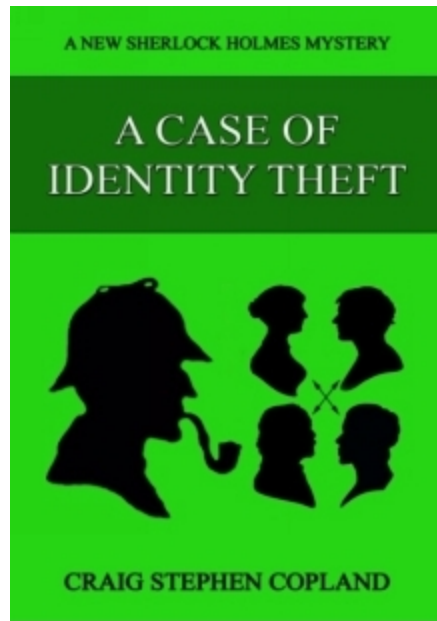
The lad's mother knows that he could not have done the foul deed and that he certainly is not mad. Her only hope is Sherlock Holmes and she calls on him to help her and rescue her son.

Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, and Watson's wife, Mary Morstan, make their way to America and enter along with thousands of immigrants seeking a new life in America. In New York City they meet the villains of Tammany Hall and, at the village where the crime took place they encounter ... maybe ...- no one will ever know for sure ... a ghostly

apparition that haunts the pleasant glade known as Sleepy Hollow.

A friend of the alleged murderer is found dead. A young woman is violated. Holmes must avoid being led astray a second time and act quickly to trap the real murderer.

The story is inspired by *The Buscombe Valley Mystery*, one of the original stories in the canon of Sherlock Holmes stories. The beloved characters of those stories are all still there present. The events and the setting may be new, but Sherlockians everywhere will recognize the mind and actions of the world's most beloved detective. It will especially appeal to those readers who also love New York. Buy it now and enjoy the adventure.



***A Case of Identity Theft.*** A not overly attractive young woman seeks the help of Sherlock Holmes. Her husband is missing. Only a few days later the missing husband arrives, breathless, at 221B Baker Street. His wife is missing. Someone has gone to a lot of trouble to get the two of the out of England and the country's greatest detective knows that some evil plot is afoot. He agrees to help them..

But then the mothers of both the young husband and the wife come asking for the services of Sherlock Holmes. Both of their children are now missing and foul play is suspected. A different young couple is found in an alley in the east #End, minus their heads. The Press scream about the return of Jack the Ripper.

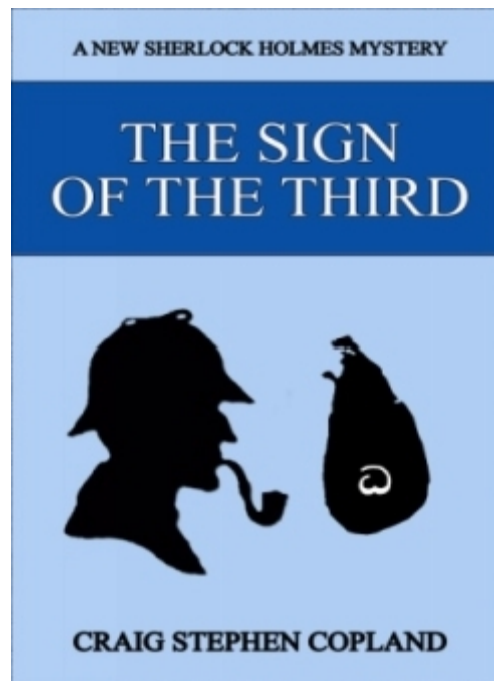
Together with Dr. Watson and with a little help from Mycroft Holmes, our wonderful sleuth must put an end to a strong of murders, recover half a million pounds in stolen securities, and rescue the young couple from certain death at the hands of the evil powers.

Fans of Sherlock Holmes will enjoy this new mystery with all the familiar characters and settings, but with a new and



intricate plot and a storyline that reaches from the East End of London to Botany Bay and beyond. Buy it now and enjoy reading yet another Sherlock Holmes mystery.

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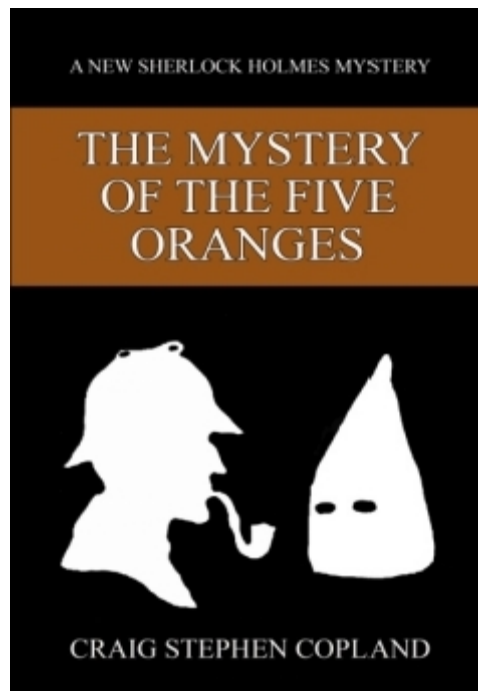
***The Sign of the Third.*** A beautiful, fair-haired young woman with exotic eyes enters 221B Baker Street. Her father, his closest friend, and a young medical student have all died in the past two weeks. Each body was found soon after death but with rigor mortis already set in. She believes they were murdered and seeks the help of Sherlock Holmes.

The mystery that led to their deaths began fifteen hundred years ago when the sacred tooth of the Buddha was brought to Ceylon. Since then it has never left the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy where it has been guarded and worshiped. Now it is coming to London, a triumph of the Empire. But what if it is stolen? It would be a disaster. And the murders area all tied to it.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, aided by the young woman, Mary Morstan, the Baker Street irregulars, and the mysterious dark-skinned irregular known as The Injin, must save the Tooth, and the Empire, and put the murdering scoundrels out of business.

Dr. Watson, ever the gentleman, cannot help but desire to help this lovely young woman who is in fear for her life. And there is something else he cannot help either.

The story is inspired by the original Sherlock Holmes mystery, *The Sign of the Four*. The New Mystery borrows the same characters, the same exotic origins, and the same setting in Victorian London, but then take the reader on an imaginative journey spanning over a thousand miles and half the globe. Fans of Sherlock Holmes will enjoy seeing their beloved characters in an entirely new murder mystery.



***The Mystery of the Five Oranges.*** On a miserable rainy evening a desperate father enters 221B Baker Street. His daughter has been kidnapped and spirited off the North America. The evil network who have taken her have spies everywhere. If he goes to Scotland Yard they will kill her. There is only one hope – Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes and Watson sail to a small corner of Canada, Prince Edward Island, in search of the girl. They find themselves fighting one of the most powerful and malicious organizations on earth – the Ku Klux Klan. But they are aided in their quest by the newest member of the Baker Street Irregulars, a determined and imaginative young redhead, and by the resources of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Sherlockians will enjoy this new adventure of the world's most famous detective, inspired by the original story of The Five Orange Pips. And those who love Anne of Green Gables will thrill to see her recruited by Holmes and Watson to help in the defeat of crime.

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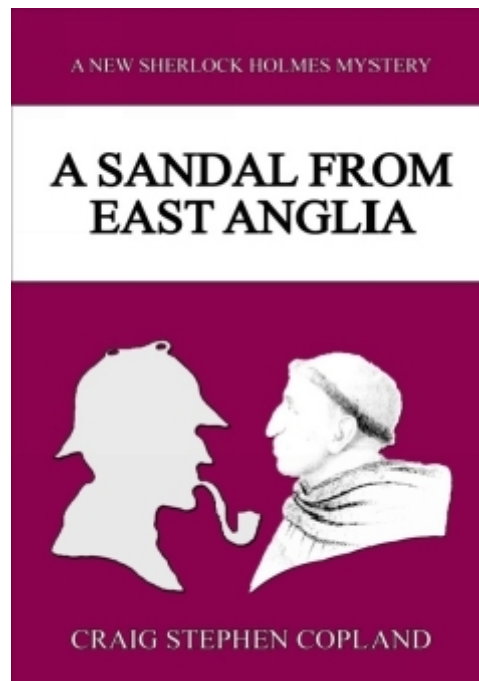
***The Adventure of the Blue Belt Buckle.*** A young street urchin, one of the Baker Street Irregulars, discovers a man's belt and buckle under a bush in Hyde Park. He brings it to Sherlock Holmes, hoping for a reward. The buckle is unique and stunning, gleaming turquoise stones set in exquisitely carved silver; a masterpiece from the native American west.

A body of an American Indian is found in a hotel room in Mayfair. Scotland Yard seeks the help of Sherlock Holmes in solving the murder. The victim is the brilliant artist that created and wore the buckle.

A secret key is found leading Sherlock Holmes to a replica set of the Crown Jewels. The real Jewels, supposedly secure inside the Tower of London are in danger of being stolen or destroyed. The Queen's Diamond Jubilee, to be held in just a few months, could be ruined.

Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, Scotland yard, the Home Office and even Her Majesty all team up to prevent a crime of unspeakable dimensions.





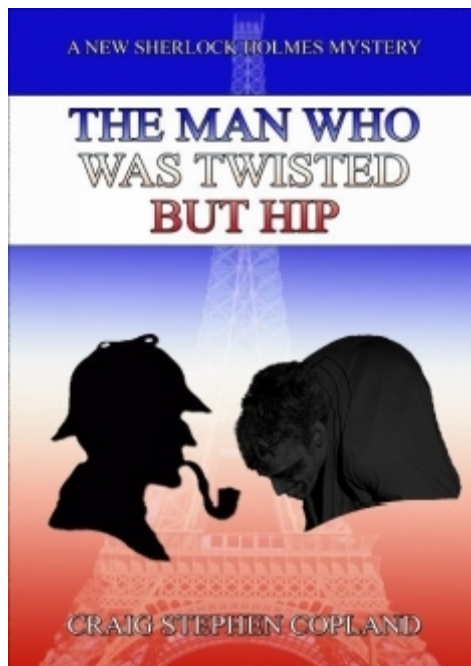
***A Sandal from East Anglia.*** Archeological excavations at the ruined Abbey of St. Edmund unearth a sealed canister. In it is a document that has the potential to change the course of the British Empire and all of Christendom.

There are some evil young men who are prepared to rob, and beat and even commit murder to keep its contents from ever becoming known. There is a strikingly beautiful young Sister, with a curious double life, who is determined to use the document to improve the lives of women throughout the world.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are called upon to protect the young woman, catch the killers, and trap the evil men who are greedily plotting against The Nun.

The mystery is inspired by the original Sherlock Holmes story, *A Scandal in Bohemia*. Fans of Sherlock Holmes will enjoy a new story that maintains all the loved and familiar characters and settings of Victorian England.





***The Man Who Was Twisted But Hip.*** It is 1897 and France is torn apart by The Dreyfus Affair, a disgraceful episode of anti-Semitism that plagued France for a decade and brought out the worst of behavior in far too many French men and women. Westminster needs help from Sherlock Holmes to make sure that the evil tide of anti-Semitism that has engulfed France will not spread.

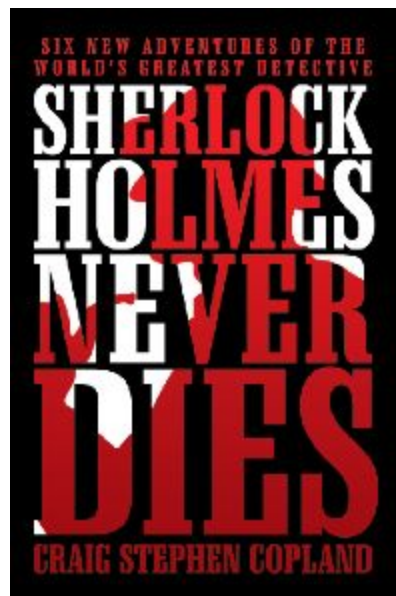
While spending an uneventful morning searching for his nephew, Dr. Watson finds Sherlock Holmes and together they watch as a man is murdered, a direct consequence of the anti-Semitic conflict that is raging just across the Channel.

Strangely, Holmes is sent by his older brother, Mycroft, to the home of a young officer in the Foreign Office who has suddenly resigned from his post and entered the theater. His wife knows that something is not right and calls upon Sherlock Holmes for help. All these events are linked together and the solving of the puzzle is to be found in Paris.

To make matters worse, the evil professor may be behind it all, and there could be terrible consequences for the young couple and all of Europe.

Sherlock and Watson run all over London and Paris solving the puzzle, thwart Moriarty, restore the young husband and wife to each other, and aid the right side of history that will eventually emerge from the dreadful Dreyfus affair.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is inspired by the original story, *The Man with the Twisted Lip* as well as by the great classic by Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.



***Sherlock Holmes Never Dies.*** Return to Baker Street, where the world's most famous detective encounters six new cases that require his expert touch. London's super sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, sets out with long suffering Watson as the detectives of Scotland Yard are stumped yet again.

Blood coats the street of Victorian England, but no evidence is clear and no suspect cleared of guilt. As to be expected, evil genius—the Napoleon of Crime—Professor Moriarty soon reappears. The great detective must thwart

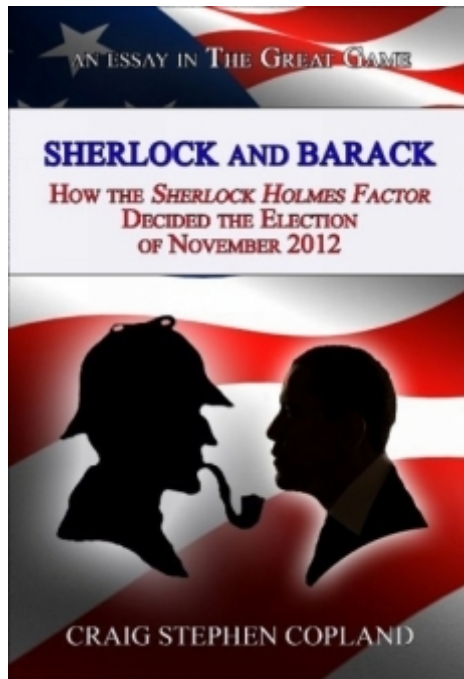
his diabolical machinations, but even Holmes is practically brought to his knees by shocking new discoveries only he can understand.

Despite Moriarty's conniving, Sherlock will use the science of deduction to unravel mysteries of theft, abduction, political intrigue, and murder. Female characters take much deserved center stage in these updated stories, no longer willing to play the part of hapless victim or jealous wife. Meanwhile, Holmes and Watson traipse the globe in search of justice. No guilty party is safe, no matter the distance, from the all-knowing eye of the world's best detective and his devoted friend.



***A Scandal in Fordlandia.*** A satirical parody —this one inspired by *A Scandal in Bohemia* and set in Toronto in 2014.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are visited by Toronto's famous mayor. He is desperate. When he was a teenager someone took some nasty photos of him. Those photos are now in the hands of his hated enemies, the Media. If they are made public, disaster could come not only upon those in the photo but on all of civilization as we know it. Holmes and Watson must retrieve the photos and save His Honour before chaos descends yet again on this most colorful politician.



***Sherlock and Barack.*** This is NOT a new Sherlock Holmes Mystery. It is a Sherlockian research paper seeking answers to some very serious questions. Why did Barack Obama win in November 2012? Why did Mitt Romney lose? Pundits and political scientists have offered countless reasons.

This book reveals the truth - The Sherlock Holmes Factor. Had it not been for Sherlock Holmes, Mitt Romney would be president. This study is the first entry by Sherlockian Craig Stephen Copland into the Grand Game of amateur analysis of the canon of Sherlock Holmes stories, and their effect on western civilization.

Sherlockians will enjoy the logical deductions that lead to the inevitable conclusions.

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